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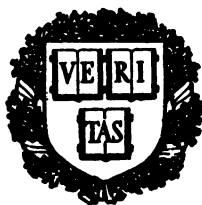
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TRAGIC ROMANCES



R. Berry

**RE-ISSUE OF THE SHORTER
STORIES OF FIONA MACLEOD **
REARRANGED, WITH
ADDITIONAL
TALES

[v. 3]

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**VOLUME
THREE**

**TRAGIC
ROMANCES**

BY

Fiona Macleod

**DAVID NUTT, AT THE SIGN OF THE PHOENIX
LONG ACRE, LONDON ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ MCMIII**

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"We are woven in one loom, and the Weaver
thrids our being with the sweet influences, not
only of the Pleiades, but of the living world of
which each is no more than a multi-coloured
thread: as, in turn, He thrids the wandering
wind with the inarticulate cry, the yearning, the
passion, the pain, of that bitter clan, the Human.

Truly, we are all one. It is a common tongue
we speak, though the wave has its own whisper,
and the wind its own sigh, and the lip of man its
word, and the heart of woman its silence."

(From the PROLOGUE to
The Washer of the Ford.)

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TRAGIC ROMANCES

E H Hall

"It is Destiny, then, that is the Protagonist in the Celtic Drama. . . . And it is Destiny, that sombre Demogorgon of the Gael, whose boding breath, whose menace, whose shadow glooms so much of the remote life I know, and hence glooms also this book of interpretations: for pages of life must either be interpretative or merely documentary, and these following pages have for the most part been written as by one who repeats, with curious insistence, a haunting, familiar, yet ever wild and remote air, whose obscure meanings he would fain reiterate, interpret."

(From the PROLOGUE to *The Sin-Eater*.)

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NOTE

IN this volume all the tales, except the first and last, are re-issued from *The Sin - Eater*. "Morag of the Glen" is reprinted from the November issue of *The Savoy*; "The Archer" has not hitherto appeared in print. As the other tales have not been reset, they are, except in the matter of pagination and arrangement, necessarily unaltered.

MORAG OF THE GLEN

MORAG OF THE GLEN

I

IT was a black hour for Archibald Campbell of Gorromalt in Strathglas, and for his wife and for Morag their second daughter, when the word came that Muireall had the sorrow of sorrows. What is pain, and is death a thing to fear? But there is a sorrow that no man can have and yet go free for evermore of a shadow upon his brow: and there is a sorrow that no woman can have and keep the moonshine in her eyes. And when a woman has this sorrow, it saves or mars her: though, for sure, none of us may discern just what that saving may be, or from whom or what, or what may be that bitter or sweet ruin. We are shaped as clay in the potter's hand: ancient wisdom, that we seldom learn till the hand is mercifully still, and the vessel, finished for good or evil, is broken.

It is a true saying that memory is like the

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seaweed when the tide is in—but the tide ebbs. Each frond, each thick spray, each fillicaun or pulpy globe, lives lightly in the wave: the green water is full of strange rumour, of sea-magic and sea-music: the hither flow and thither surge give continuity and connection to what is fluid and dissolute. But when the ebb is far gone, and the wrack and the weed lie sickly in the light, there is only one confused intertangled mass. For most of us, memory is this tide-left strand: though for each there are pools, or shallows which even the ebb does not lick up in its thirsty way depthward,—narrow overshadowed channels to which we have the intangible clues. But for me there will never be any ebb-tide of memory, of one black hour, and one black day.

A wild lone place it was where we lived: among the wet hills, in a country capped by slate-black mountains. To the stranger the whole scene must have appeared grimly desolate. We, dwellers there, and those of our clan, and the hill folk about and beyond, knew that there were three fertile straths hidden among the wilderness of rock and

bracken : Strathmòr, Strathgorm, and Strathglas. It was in the last we lived. All Strathglas was farmed by Archibald Campbell, and he had Strathgorm to where the Gorromalt Water cuts it off from the head of Glen Annet. The house we lived in was a long two-storeyed whitewashed building with projecting flanks. There was no garden, but only a tangled potato-acre, and a large unkempt space where the kail and the bracken flourished side by side, with the kail perishing day by day under the spreading strangling roots of the usurper. The rain in Strathglas fell when most other spots were fair. It was because of the lie of the land, I have heard. The grey or black cloud would slip over Ben-Bhreac or Melbèinn, and would become blue-black while one was wondering if the wind would lift it on to Maol-Dunn, whose gloomy ridge had two thin lines of pine-trees which, from Strathglas, stood out like bristling eyebrows. But, more likely than not, it would lean slowly earthward, then lurch like a water-logged vessel, and spill, spill, through a rising misty vapour, a dreary downfall. Oh ! the rain—

the rain—the rain! how weary I grew of it, there; and of the melancholy *mél'ing* of the sheep, that used to fill the hills with a lamentation, terrible, at times, to endure.

And yet, I know, and that well, too, that I am thinking this vision of Teenabrae, as the house was called, and of its dismal vicinage, in the light of tragic memory. For there were seasons when the rains suspended, or came and went like fugitive moist shadows: days when the sunlight and the wind made the mountains wonderful, and wrought the wild barren hills to take on a softness and a dear familiar beauty: hours, even, when, in the hawthorn-time, the cuckoo called joyously across the pine-girt scaurs and corries on Melbèinn, or, in summer, the swallows filled the straths as with the thridding of a myriad shuttles.

Sure enough, I was too young to be there: though, indeed, Morag was no more than a year older, being twenty; but when my mother died, and my father went upon the seas upon one of his long whaling voyages, I was glad to leave my lonely home in the Carse o' Gowrie and go to Teenabrae in

Strathglas, and to be with my aunt, that was wife to Archibald mac Alasdair Ruadh—Archibald Campbell, as he would be called in the lowland way—or Gorromalt as he was named by courtesy, that being the name of his sheep-farm that ran into the two straths where the Gorromalt Water surged turbulently through a narrow wilderness of wave-scooped, eddy-hollowed stones and ledges.

I suppose no place could be called lifeless which had always that sound of Gorromalt Water, that ceaseless lamentation of the sheep crying among the hills, that hoarse croaking of the corbies who swam black in the air betwixt us and Maol-Dunn, that mournful plaining of the lapwings as they wheeled querulously for ever and ever and ever. But, to a young girl, the whole of this was an unspeakable weariness.

Beside the servant-folk—not one of whom was to me anything, save a girl called Maisie, who had had a child and believed it had become a “pee-wit” since its death, and that all the lapwings were the offspring of the sorrow of joy—there were only Archibald Campbell, his wife, who was my aunt, Muireall

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the elder daughter, and Morag. These were my folk: but Morag I loved. In appearance she and I differed wholly. My cousin Muireall and I were like each other; both tall, dark-haired, dark-browed, with dusky dark eyes, though mine with no flame in them; and my face too, though not uncomely, without that touch of wildness which made Muireall's so strangely attractive, and at times so beautiful. Morag, however, was scarce over medium height. Her thick wavy hair always retained the captive gold that the sunshine had spilled there; her soft, white, delicate, wild-rose face was like none other that I have ever seen: her eyes, of that heart-lifting blue which spring mornings have, held a living light that was fair to see, and gave pain too, perhaps, because of their plaintive hillside wildness. Ah, she was a fawn, Morag! . . . soft and sweet, swift and dainty and exquisite as a fawn in the green fern.

Gorromalt himself was a gaunt stern man. He was two inches or more over six feet, but looked less, because of a stoop. It always seemed to me as if his eyes pulled him forward: brooding, sombre, obscure eyes, of a murky

gloom. His hair was iron-grey and matted; blacker, but matted and tangled, his thick beard; and his face was furrowed like Ben Scorain of the Corries. I never saw him in any other garb than a grey shepherd tweed with a plaid, though no Campbell in Argyll was prouder than he, and he allowed no plaid or *tunag* anywhere on his land or in his house that was not of the tartan of MacCailin Mòr. He was what, there, they called a black protestant; for the people in that part held to the ancient faith. True enough, for sure, all the same: for his pity was black, and the milk of kindness in him must have been like Gorromalt Water in spate. Poor Aunt Elspeth! my heart often bled for her. I do not think Archibald Campbell was unkind to his wife, but he was harsh, and his sex was like a blank wall to her, against which her shallow waters surged or crawled alike vainly. There was to her something at once terrible and Biblical in this wall of cruel strength, this steadfast independence of love or the soft ways or the faltering speech of love. There are women who hate men with an unknowing hatred, who lie by their husband night after night,

year after year ; who fear and serve him ; who tend him in life and minister to him in death ; who die, before or after, with a slaying thirst, a consuming hunger. Of these unhappy housemates, of desolate hearts and unfrequented lips, my aunt Elspeth was one.

It was on a dull Sunday afternoon that the dark hour came of which I have spoken. The rain fell among the hills. There was none on the north side of Strathglas, where Teena-brae stood solitary. The remembrance is on me keen just now : how I sat there, on the bench in front of the house, side by side with Morag, in the hot August damp, with the gnats pinging overhead, and not a sound else save the loud raucous surge of Gorromalt Water, thirty yards away. In a chair near us sat my aunt Elspeth. Beyond her, on a milking-stool, with his chin in his hands, and his elbows on his knees, was her husband.

There was a gloom upon all of us. The day before, as soon as Gorromalt had returned from Castle Avale, high up in Strathmòr, we had seen the black east wind in his eyes. But he had said nothing. We guessed that his visit to the Englishman at Castle Avale,

who had bought the Three Straths from Sir Ewan Campbell of Drumdoon, had proved fruitless, or at least unsatisfactory. It was at the porridge on the Sabbath morning that he told us.

"And . . . and . . . must we go, Archibald?" asked his wife, her lips white and the deep withered creases on her neck ashy grey.

He did not answer, but the tumbler cracked in his grip, and the splintered glass fell into his plate. The spilt milk trickled off the table on to the end of his plaid, and so to the floor. Luath, the collie, slipped forward, with her tongue lolling greedily: but her eye caught the stare of the silent man, and with a whine, and a sudden sweep of her tail, she slunk back.

It must have been nigh an hour later, that he spoke.

"No, Elspeth," he said. "There will be no going away from here, for you and me, till we go feet foremost."

Before the afternoon we had heard all: how he had gone to see this English lord who had "usurped" Drumdoon: how he had not

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gained an interview, and had seen no other than Mr Laing, the East Lothian factor. He had had to accept bitter hard terms. Sir Ewan Campbell was in Madras, with his regiment, a ruined man: he would never be home again, and, if he were, would be a stranger in the Three Straths, where he and his had lived, and where his kindred had been born and had died during six centuries back. There was no hope. This Lord Greycourt wanted more rent, and he also wanted Strathgorm for a deer-run.

We were sitting, brooding on these things: in our ears the fierce words that Gorromalt had said, with bitter curses, upon the selling of the ancient land and the betrayal of the people.

Morag was in one of her strange moods. I saw her, with her shining eyes, looking at the birch that overhung the small foaming linn beyond us, just as though she saw the soul of it, and the soul with strange speech to it.

"Where is Muireall?" she said to me suddenly, in a low voice.

"Muireall?" I repeated, "Muireall? I am

not for knowing, Morag. Why do you ask? Do you want her?"

She did not answer, but went on :

"Have you seen him again?"

"Him? . . . Whom?"

"Jasper Morgan, this English lord's son."

"No."

A long silence followed. Suddenly Aunt Elspeth started. Pointing to a figure coming from the peat-moss at the hither end of Strathmòr, she asked who it was, as she could not see without her spectacles. Her husband rose, staring eagerly. He gave a grunt of disappointment when he recognised Mr Allan Stewart, the minister of Strathmòr parish.

As the old man drew near we watched him steadfastly. I have the thought that each one of us knew he was coming to tell us evil news; though none guessed why or what, unless Morag mayhap.

When he had shaken hands, and blessed the house and those within it, Mr Stewart sat down on the bench beside Morag and me. I am thinking he wanted not to see the eyes of Gorromalt, nor to see the white face of Aunt Elspeth.

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I heard him whisper to my dear that he wanted her to go into the house for a little. But she would not. The birdeen knew that sorrow was upon us all. He saw "no" in her eyes, and forbore.

"And what is the thing that is on your lips to tell, Mr Stewart?" said Gorromalt at last, half-mockingly, half-sullenly.

"And how are you for knowing that I have anything to tell, Gorromalt?"

"Sure, man, if a kite can see the shadow of a mouse a mile away, it can see a black cloud on a hill near by!"

"It's a black cloud I bring, Archibald Campbell: alas, even so. Ay, sure, it is a black cloud it is. God melt the pain of it!"

"Speak, man!"

"There is no good in wading in heather. Gorromalt, and you, Mrs Campbell, and you, my poor Morag, and you too, my dear, must just be brave. It is God's will."

"Speak, man, and don't be winding the shroud all the time! Let us be hearing and seeing the thing you have brought to tell us."

It was at this moment that Aunt Elspeth half rose, and abruptly reseated herself, raising the while a deprecatory feeble hand.

"Is it about Muireall?" she asked quaveringly. "She went away, to the church at Kilbrennan, at sunrise: and the water's in spate all down Strathgorm. Has she been drowned? Is it death upon Muireall? Is it Muireall? Is it Muireall?"

"She is not drowned, Mrs Campbell."

At that she sat back, the staring dread subsiding from her eyes. But at the minister's words, Gorromalt slowly moved his face and body so that he fronted the speaker. Looking at Morag, I saw her face white as the canna. Her eyes swam in wet shadow.

"It is not death, Mrs Campbell," the old man repeated, with a strange, uneasy, furtive look, as he put his right hand to his stiff white necktie and flutteringly fingered it.

"In the name o' God, man, speak out!"

"Ay, ay, Campbell: ay, ay, I am speaking. . . . I am for the telling . . . but . . . but, see you, Gorromalt, be pitiful . . . be . . ."

Gorromalt rose. I never realised before how

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tall he was. There was height to him, like unto that of a son of Anak.

"Well, well, well, it is just for telling you I'll be. Sit down, Gorromalt, sit down, Mr Campbell, sit down, man, sit down! Ah, sure now, that is better. Well, well, God save us all from the sin that is in us: but . . . ah, mothering heart, it is saving you I would be if I could, but but"

"But *what!*" thundered Gorromalt, with a voice that brought Maisie and Kirsteen out of the byre, where they were milking the kye.

"He has the mercy: He only! And it is this, poor people: it is this. Muireall has come to sorrow."

"What sorrow is the sorrow that is on her?"

"The sorrow of woman."

A terrible oath leapt from Gorromalt's lips. His wife sat in a stony silence, her staring eyes filming like those of a stricken bird. Morag put her left hand to her heart.

Suddenly Archibald Campbell turned to his daughter.

"Morag, what is the name of that man

whom Muireall came to know, when she and you went to that Sodom, that Gomorrha, which men call London?"

"His name was Jasper Morgan."

"Has she ever seen him since?"

"I think so."

"You *think*? What will you be *thinking* for, girl! *Think!* There will be time enough to think while the lichen grows grey on a new-fall'n rock! Out with it! Out with it! Have they met? . . . Has he been here? . . . is *he* the man?"

There was silence then. A plover wheeled by, plaining aimlessly. Maisie the milk-lass ran forward, laughing.

"Ah, 'tis my wee Seorsa," she cried. "Seorsa! Seorsa! Seorsa!"

Gorromalt took a stride forward, his face shadowy with anger, his eyes ablaze.

"Get back to the kye, you wanton wench!" he shouted savagely. "Get back, or it is having my gun I'll be and shooting that pee-wit of yours, that lennavan-Seorsa!"

Then, shaking still, he turned to Morag.

"Out with it, girl! What do you know?"

"I know nothing."

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"It is a lie, and it is knowing it I am!"

"It is no lie. I *know* nothing. I *fear* much."

"And what do *you* know, old man?" And, with that, Archibald Campbell turned like a baited bull upon Mr Stewart.

"She was misled, Gorromalt, she was misled, poor lass! The trouble began last May, when she went away to the south, to that evil place. And then he came after her. And it was here he came . . . and . . . and . . ."

"And who will that man be?"

"Morag has said it: Jasper Morgan."

"And who will Jasper Morgan be?"

"Are you not for knowing *that*, Archibald Campbell, and you *Gorromalt*?"

"Why, what meaning are you at?" cried the man, bewildered.

"Who will Jasper Morgan be but the son of Stanley Morgan!"

"Stanley Morgan! . . . Stanley Morgan! I am no wiser. Do you wish to send me mad, man! Speak out! . . . out with it!"

"Why, Gorromalt, what is Drumdoon's name?"

"Drumdoon . . . Why, Sir Ewan . . . Ah

no, for sure 'tis now that English bread-taker, that southern land-snatcher, who calls himself Lord Greycourt. And what then? . . . will it be for . . ."

"Aren't you for knowing his name? . . . No? . . . Campbell, man, it is *Morgan* . . . *Morgan*."

All this time Aunt Elspeth had sat silent. She now gave a low cry. Her husband turned and looked at her. "Go into the house," he said harshly; "this will not be the time for whimpering; no, by God! it is not the time for whimpering, woman."

She rose, and walked feebly over to Mr Stewart.

"Tell me all," she said. Ah, grief to see the pain in her old, old eyes—and no tears there at all, at all.

"When this man Jasper Morgan, that is son to Lord Greycourt, came here, it was to track a stricken doe. And now all is over. There is this note only. It is for Morag."

Gorromalt leaned forward to take it. But I had seen the wild look in Morag's eyes, and I snatched it from Mr Stewart, and

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gave it to my dear, who slipped it beneath her kerchief.

Sullenly her father drew up, scowled, but said nothing.

"What else?" he asked, turning to the minister.

"She is dying."

"Dying!"

"Ay, alas, alas—the mist is on the hill—the mist is on the hill—and she so young, too, and so fair, ay, and so sweet and——"

"That will do, Allan Stewart! That will do! . . . It is dying she is, you are for telling us! Well, well, now, and she the plaything o' Jasper Morgan, the son of the man there at Drumdoon, the man who wants to drive me away from here . . . this *new* man . . . this, this lord . . . he . . . to drive *me* away, who have the years and years to go upon, ay, for more than six hundred weary long years——"

"Muireall is dying, Archibald Campbell. Will you be coming to see her, who is your very own?"

"And for why is she dying?"

"She could not wait."

"Wait! Wait! She could wait to shame me and mine! No, no, no, Allan Stewart, you go back to Lord Greycourt's son and his *leannan*, and say that neither Gorromalt nor any o' Gorromalt's kith or kin will have aught to do with that wastrel-lass. Let her death be on her! But it's a soon easy death it is! . . . she that slept here this very last night, and away this morning across the moor like a louping doe, before sunburst and an hour to that!"

"She is at the 'Argyll Arms' in Kilbrennan. She met the man there. An hour after he had gone, they found her, lying on the deer-skin on the hearth, and she with the death-sickness on her, and grave-white, because of the poison there beside her. And now, Archibald Campbell, it is not refusing you will be to come to your own daughter, and she with death upon her, and at the edge o' the silence!"

But with that Gorromalt uttered wild, savage words, and thrust the old man before him, and bade him begone, and cursed Muireall, and the child she bore within her, and the man who had done this thing, and the father

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that had brought him into the world, latest adder of an evil brood!

Scarce, however, was the minister gone, and he muttering sore, and frowning darkly at that, than Gorromalt reeled and fell.

The blood had risen to his brain, and he had had a stroke. Sure, the sudden hand of God is a terrifying thing. It was all we could do, with the help of Maisie and Kirsteen, to lift and drag him to his bed.

But an hour after that, when the danger was over, I went to seek Morag. I could find her nowhere. Maisie had seen her last. I thought that she had taken one of the horses from the stable, and ridden towards Kilbrennan: but there was no sign of this. On the long weary moor-road that led across Strathglas to Strathgorm, she could not have walked without being seen by some one at Teenabrae. And everyone there was now going to and fro, with whispers and a dreadful awe.

So I turned and went down by the linn. From there I could see three places where Morag loved to lie and dream: and at one of these I hoped to descry her.

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And, sure, so it was. A glimpse I caught of her, across the spray of the linn. She was far up the brown Gorromalt Water, and crouched under a rowan-tree.

When I reached her she looked up with a start. Ah, the pain of those tear-wet May-blue eyes—deep tarns of grief to me they seemed.

In her hand she clasped the letter that I had snatched for her.

“Read it, dear,” she said simply.

It was in pencil, and, strangely, was in the Gaelic: strangely, for though, when with Mr and Mrs Campbell, Morag and I spoke the language we all loved, and that was our own, Muireall rarely did. The letter ran somewhat thus:

“MORAG-À-GHRAIDH,

“When you get this I shall not be your living sister any more, but only a memory. I take the little one with me. You know my trouble. Forgive me. I have only one thing to ask. The man has not only betrayed me, he has lied to me about his love. He loves another woman. And that woman, Morag, is

C

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you: and you know it. He loved you first. And now, Morag, I will tell you one thing only. Do you remember the story that old Sheen McLan told us—that about the twin sisters of the mother of our mother—one that was a Morag too?

“I am thinking you do: and here—where I shall soon be lying dead, with that silence within me, where such a wild clamouring voice has been, though inaudible to other ears than mine—*here, I am thinking you will be remembering, and realising, that story!*”

“If, Morag, *if* you do not remember—but ah, no, we are of the old race of Siol Dhiarmid, *and you will remember!*”

“Tell no one of this, except F.—*at the end.*”

“Morag, dear sister, till we meet——

MUIREALL.”

“I do not understand, Morag-my-heart,” I said. Even now, my hand shook because of these words: “*and that woman, Morag, is you: and you know it.*”

“Not now,” she answered, wearily. “I will tell you to-night: but not now.”

And so we went back together; she, too

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tired and stricken for tears, and I with so many in my heart that there were none for my hot eyes.

As we passed the byre we heard Kirsteen finishing a milking song, but we stopped when Maisie suddenly broke in, with her strange, wild, haunting-sweet voice.

I felt Morag's fingers tighten in their grasp on my arm as we stood silent, with averted eyes, listening to an old Gaelic ballad of "Morag of the Glen."

When Morag of the Glen was fëy
They took her where the Green Folk stray :
And there they left her, night and day,
A day and night they left her, fëy.

And when they brought her home again,
Aye of the Green Folk was she fain :
They brought her *leannan*, Roy McLean,
She looked at him with proud disdain.

"For I have killed a man," she said,
"A better man than you to wed :
I slew him when he claspt my head,
And now he sleepeth with the dead.

"And did you see that little wren ?
My sister dear it was, flew then !
That skull her home, that eye her den,
Her song is, *Morag o' the Glen* !

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"For when she went I did not go,
But washed my hands in blood-red woe :
O wren, trill out your sweet song's flow,
Morag is white as the driven snow !"

II

That night the wind had a dreadful soughing in its voice—a lamentable voice that came along the rain-wet face of the hills, with a prolonged moaning and sobbing.

Down in the big room, that was kitchen and sitting-room in one, where Gorromalt sat—for he had risen from his bed, for all that he was so weak and giddy—there was darkness. His wife had pleaded for the oil-lamp, because the shadows within and the wild wind without—though, I am thinking, most the shadows within her brain—filled her with dread ; but he would not have it, no, not a candle even. The peats glowed, red-hot ; above them the small narrow pine-logs crackled in a scarlet and yellow blaze.

Hour after hour went by in silence. There were but the three of us. Morag? Ah, did Gorromalt think she would stay at Teenabrae, and Muireall near by, and in the clutch of

the death-frost, and she, her sister dear, not go to her? He had put the ban upon us, soon as the blood was out of his brain, and he could half rise from his pillow. No one was to go to see her, no one was to send word to her, no one was to speak of her.

At that, Aunt Elspeth had fallen on her knees beside the bed, and prayed to him to show pity. The tears rained upon the relentless heavy hand she held and kissed. "At the least," she moaned, "at the least, let some one go to her, Archibald; at least a word, only one word!"

"Not a word, woman, not a word. She has sinned, but that's the way o' women o' that kind. Let her be. The wind'll blow her soul against God's heavy hand, this very night o' the nights. It's not for you nor for me. But I'm saying this, I am: curse her, ay, curse her again and again, for that she let the son of the stranger, the son of our enemy, who would drive us out of the home we have, the home of our fathers, ay, back to the time when no English foot ever trod the heather of Argyll, that she would let him do her this shame and disgrace, her and me, an' you too,

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ay, and all of our blood, and the Strath too, for that—ay, by God, and the clan, the whole clan !”

But though Gorromalt's word was law there, there was one who had the tide coming in at one ear and going out at the other. As soon as the rainy gloom deepened into dark, she slipped from the house ; I wanted to go with her, but she whispered to me to stay. It was well I did. I was able to keep back from him, all night, the story of Morag's going. He thought she was in her bed. So bitter on the man was his wrath, that, ill as he was, he would have risen, and ridden or driven over to Kilbrennan, had he known Morag was gone there.

Angus Macallum, Gorromalt's chief man, was with the horses in the stable. He tried to prevent Morag taking out Gealcas, the mare, she that went faster and surer than any there. He even put hand upon the lass, and said a rough word. But she laughed, I am told ; and I am thinking that whoever heard Morag laugh, when she was “strange,” for all that she was so white and soft, she with her hair o' sunlight, and the blue, blue

eyes o' her!—whoever heard *that* would not be for standing in her way.

So Angus had stood back, sullenly giving no help, but no longer daring to interfere. She mounted Gealcas, and rode away into the dark rainy night where the wind went loup-ing to and fro among the crags on the braes as though it were mad with fear or pain, and complaining wild, wild—the lamentable cry of the hills.

Hour after hour we sat there. We could hear the roaring sound of Gorromalt Water as it whirled itself over the linn. The stream was in spate, and would be boiling black, with livid clots of foam flung here and there on the dripping heather overhanging the torrent. The wind's endless sough came into the house, and wailed in the keyholes and the chinks. Rory, the blind collie, lay on a mat near the door, and the long hair of his felt was blown upward, and this way and that, by the ground-draught.

Once or twice Aunt Elspeth rose, and stirred the porridge that seethed and bubbled in the pot. Her husband took no notice. He was in a daze, and sat in his flanked leathern arm-

chair, with his arms laid along the sides, and his down-clasping hands catching the red gleam of the peats, and his face, white and set, like that of a dead man looking out of a grated prison.

Once or twice, an hour or so before, when she had begun to croon some hymn, he had harshly checked her. But now when she hummed, and at last openly sang the Gaelic version of "The Lord's my Shepherd," he paid no heed. He was not hearing that, or anything she did. I could make nothing of the cold bitterness that was on his face. He brooded, I doubt not, upon doom for the man, and the son of the man, who had wrought him this evil.

His wife saw this, and so had her will at last. She took down the great Gaelic Bible, and read Christ's words about little children. The rain slashed against the window-panes. Beyond, the wind moaned, and soughed, and moaned. From the kennel behind the byre a mournful howling rose and fell; but Gorromalt did not stir.

Aunt Elspeth looked at me despairingly. Poor old woman; ah, the misery and pain of it, the weariness and long pain of starved

hearts and barren hopes. Suddenly an idea came to her. She rose again, and went over to the fire. Twice she passed in front of her husband. He made no sign.

"He hates those things," she muttered to me, her eyes wet with pain, and with something of shame, too, for admitting that she believed in incantations. And why not, poor old woman? Sure there are stranger things than *sian* or *rosad*, charm or spell; and who can say that the secret old wisdom is mere foam o' thought. "He hates those things, but I am for saving my poor lass if I can. I will be saying that old ancient *eolas*, that is called the *Eolas an t-Snaithean*."

"What is that, Aunt Elspeth? What are the three threads?"

"That *eolas* killed the mother of my mother, dearie; she that was a woman out of the isle of Benbecula."

"Killed her!" I repeated, awe-struck.

"Ay; 'tis a charm for the doing away of bewitchment, and sure it is my poor Muireall who has been bewitched. But my mother's mother used the *eolas* for the taking away of a curse upon a cow that would not give

milk. She was saying the incantation for the third time, and winding the triple thread round the beast's tail, when in a moment all the ill that was in the cow came forth and settled upon her, so that she went back to her house quaking and sick with the blight, and died of it next day, because there was no one to take it from her in turn by that or any other *eolas*."

I listened in silence. The thing seemed terrible to me then; no, no, not then only, but now, too, whenever I think of it.

"Say it then, Aunt Elspeth," I whispered; "say it, in the name of the Holy Three."

With that she went on her knees, and leaned against her chair, though with her face towards her husband, because of the fear that was ever in her. Then in a low voice, choked with sobs, she said this old *eolas*, after she had first uttered the holy words of the "Pater Noster":

*"Chi suil thu,
Labhraidh bial thu;
Smuainichidh cridhe thu.
Tha Fear an righthighe
Gad' choisreagadh,
An t- Athair, am Mac, 's an Spiorad Naomh.*

"Ceathrar a rinn do chron—

Fear agus bean,

Gille agus nighean.

Co tha gu sin a thilleadh?

Tri Pearsannan na Trianaid ro-naomh,

An t-Athair, am Mac, 's an Spioraid Naomh.

"Tha mi 'cur fianuis gu Moire, agus gu Brighde,

Ma 's e duine rinn do chron,

Le droch run,

No le droch shuil,

No le droch chridhe,

Gu'm bi thusa, Muireall gu math,

Ri linn so a chur mu'n cuairt ort.

An ainm an Athar, a' Mhic, 's an Spioraid Naomh!"

("An eye will see you,

Tongue will speak of you,

Heart will think of you,

The Man of Heaven

Blesses you—

The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

"Four caused your hurt—

Man and Wife,

Young man, and maiden.

Who is to frustrate that?

The three Persons of the most Holy Trinity,

The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

"I call the Virgin Mary and St Bridget to witness

That if your hurt was caused by man,

Through ill-will,

Or the evil eye,

Or a wicked heart,

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That you, Muireall, my daughter, may be whole—
And this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the
Holy Ghost !”)

Just as she finished, and as she was lingering on the line, “*Gu'm bi thusa, Muireall gu math,*” Rory, the blind collie, rose, whimpered, and stood with snarling jaws.

Strangely enough, Gorromalt heard this, though his ears had been deaf to all else, or so it seemed, at least.

“Down, Rory! down, beast!” he exclaimed, in a voice strangely shrill and weak.

But the dog would not be still. His sullen fear grew worse. Suddenly he sidled and lay on his belly, now snarling, now howling, his blind eyes distended, his nostrils quivering, his flanks quaking. My uncle rose and stared at the dog.

“What ails the beast?” he asked angrily, looking now at Rory, now at us. “Has any one come in? Has any one been at the door?”

“No one, Archibald.”

“What have you been doing, Elspeth?”

“Nothing.”

“Woman, I heard your voice droning at

your prayers. Ah, I see—you have been at some of your *sians* and *eolais* again. Sure, now, one would be thinking you would have less foolishness, and you with the greyness upon your years. What *eolas* did she say, lass?”

I told him. “Aw, silly woman that she is, the *eolas an t-Snaithnean*! madness and folly! . . . Where is Morag?”

“In bed.” I said this with truth in my eyes. God’s forgiveness for that good lie!

“And it’s time you were there also, and you too, Elspeth. Come now, no more of this foolishness. We have nothing to wait for. Why are we waiting here?”

At that moment Rory became worse than ever. I thought the poor blind beast would take some dreadful fit. Foam was on his jaws; his hair bristled. He had sidled forward, and crouched low. We saw him look again and again towards the blank space to his right, as if, blind though he was, he saw some one there, some one that gave him fear, but no longer a fierce terror. Nay, more than once we saw him swish his tail, and sniff as though recognisingly. But when he

turned his head towards the door his sullen fury grew, and terror shook upon every limb. It was now that Gorromalt was speaking.

Suddenly the dog made a leap forward—a terrible bristling wolf he seemed to me, though no wolf had I ever seen, or imagined any more fearsome, than Rory, now.

He dashed himself against the door, snarling and mouthing, with his snout nosing the narrow slip at the bottom.

Aunt Elspeth and I shook with fear. My uncle was death-white, but stood strangely brooding. He had his right elbow upon his breast, and supported it with his left arm, while with his right hand he plucked at his beard.

“For sure,” he said at last, with an effort to seem at ease; “for sure the dog is fëy with his age and his blindness.” Then, more slowly still, “And if that were not so, it might look as though he had the fear on him, because of some one who strove to come in.”

“It is Muireall,” I whispered, scarce above my breath.

“No,” said Aunt Elspeth, and the voice of

her now was as though it had come out of the granite all about us, cold and hard as that. "No! Muireall is already in the room."

We both turned and looked at her. She sat quite still, on the chair betwixt the fire and the table. Her face was rigid, ghastly, but her eyes were large and wild.

A look first of fear, then almost of tenderness, came into her husband's face.

"Hush, Elspeth," he said, "that is foolishness."

"It is not foolishness, Archibald," she resumed in the same hard, unemotional voice, but with a terrible intensity. "Man, man, because ye are blind, is there no sight for those who can see?"

"There is no one here but ourselves."

But now Aunt Elspeth half rose, with supplicating arms:

"Muireall! Muireall! Muireall. O muirnean, muirnean!"

I saw Archibald Campbell shaking as though he were a child and no strong man. "Will you be telling us this, Elspeth," he began in a hoarse voice—"will you be telling me this: if Muireall is in the room, beyond

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Rory there, who will be at the door? Who is trying to come in at the door?"

"It's a man. I do not know the man. It is a man. It is Death, maybe. I do not know the man. O muirnean, mo muirnean!"

But now the great gaunt black dog—terrible in his seeing blindness he was to me—began again his savage snarling, his bristling insensate fury. He had ceased a moment while our voices filled the room, and had sidled a little way towards the place where Aunt Elspeth saw Muireall, whining low as he did so, and swishing his tail furtively along the whitewashed flagstones.

I know not what awful thing would have happened. It seemed to me that Death was coming to all of us.

But at that moment we all heard the sound of a galloping horse. There was a lull in the wind, and the rain lashed no more like a streaming whistling whip. Even Rory crouched silent, his nostrils quivering, his curled snout showing his fangs.

Gorromalt stood, listening intently.

"By the living God," he exclaimed suddenly, his eyes like a goaded bull's—"I know that

horse. Only one horse runs like that at the gallop. 'Tis the grey stallion I sold three months ago to the man at Drumdoon—ay, ay, for the son of the man at Drumdoon! A horse to ride for the shooting—a good horse for the hills—that was what he wanted! Ay, ay, by God, a horse for the son of the man at Drumdoon! It's the grey stallion: no other horse in the Straths runs like that—d'ye hear? d'ye hear? Elspeth, woman, is there hearing upon you for *that*? Hey, *tlot-a-tlot, tlot-a-tlot, tlot-tlot-tlot-tlot, tlot-a-tlot, tlot-tlot-tlot!* I tell you, woman, it's the grey stallion I sold to Drumdoon: it's that and no other! Ay, by the Sorrow, it's Drumdoon's son that will be riding here!"

By this time the horse was close by. We heard his hoofs clang above the flagstones round the well at the side of the house. Then there was a noise as of scattered stones, and a long scraping sound: then silence.

Gorromalt turned and put his hand to the door. There was murder in his eyes, for all the smile, a grim terrible smile, that had come to his lips.

Aunt Elspeth rose and ran to him, holding

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him back. The door shook. Rory the hound tore at the splinters at the base of the door, his fell again bristling, his snarling savagery horrible to hear. The pine-logs had fallen into a smouldering ash. The room was full of gloom, though the red sullen eye of the peat-glow stared through the obscurity.

"Don't be opening the door! Don't be opening the door!" she cried, in a thin screaming voice.

"What for no, woman? Let me go! Hell upon this dog—out o' the way, Rory—get back! Down wi' ye!"

"No, no, Archibald! Wait! Wait!"

Then a strange thing happened.

Rory ceased, sullenly listened, and then retreated, but no longer snarling and bristling.

Gorromalt suddenly staggered.

"Who touched me just now?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

No one answered.

"Who touched me just now? Who passed? Who slid past me?" His voice rose almost to a scream.

Then, shaking off his wife, he swung the door open.

There was no one there. Outside could be heard a strange sniffing and whinnying. It was the grey stallion.

Gorromalt strode across the threshold. Scarcely had I time to prevent Aunt Elspeth from falling against the lintel in a corner, yet in a moment's interval I saw that the stallion was riderless.

"Archibald!" wailed his wife faintly out of her weakness. "Archibald, come back! Come back!"

But there was no need to call. Archibald Campbell was not the man to fly in the face of God. He knew that no mortal rider rode that horse to its death that night. Even before he closed the door we heard the rapid, sliding, catching gallop. The horse had gone: rider or riderless I know not.

He was ashy-grey. Suddenly he had grown quite still. He lifted his wife, and helped her to her own big leathern arm-chair at the other side of the ingle.

"Light the lamp, lass," he said to me, in a hushed strange voice. Then he stooped and threw some small pine-logs on the peats, and stirred the blaze till it caught the dry splintered edges.

Rory, poor blind beast, came wearily and with a low whine to his side, and then lay down before the warm blaze.

"Bring the Book," he said to me.

I brought the great leather-bound Gaelic Bible, and laid it on his knees.

He placed his hand in it, and opened at random.

"With Himself be the word," he said.

"Is it Peace?" asked Aunt Elspeth in a tremulous whisper.

"It is Peace," he answered, his voice gentle, his face stern as a graven rock. And what he read was this, where his eye chanced upon as he opened at the place where is the Book of the Vision of Nahum the Elkoshite :

"What do ye imagine against the Lord? He will make a full end."

After that there was a silence. Then he rose, and told me to go and lie down and sleep; for, on the morrow, after dawn, I was to go with him to where Muireall was.

I saw Aunt Elspeth rise and put her arms about him. They had peace. I went to my room, but after a brief while returned, and

sat, in the quietness there, by the glowing peats, till dawn.

The greyness came at last; with it, the rain ceased. The wind still soughed and wailed among the corries and upon the rocky braes; with low moans sighing along the flanks of the near hills, and above the stony watercourse where the Gorromalt surged with swirling foam and loud and louder tumult.

My eyes had closed in my weariness, when I heard Rory give a low growl, followed by a contented whimper. Almost at the same moment the door opened. I looked up, startled.

It was Morag.

She was so white, it is scarce to be wondered at that I took her at first for a wraith. Then I saw how drenched she was, chilled to the bone too. She did not speak as I led her in, and made her stand before the fire, while I took off her soaked dress and shoes. In silence she made all the necessary changes, and in silence drank the tea I brewed for her.

"Come to my room with me," she whis-

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pered, as with quiet feet we crossed the stone flags and went up the wooden stair that led to her room.

When she was in bed she bade me put out the light and lie down beside her. Still silent, we lay there in the darkness, for at that side of the house the hill-gloom prevailed, and moreover the blind was down-drawn. I thought the weary moaning of the wind would make my very heart sob.

Then, suddenly, Morag put her arms about me, and the tears streamed warm about my neck.

"Hush, Morag-aghray, hush, mo-rùn," I whispered in her ear. "Tell me what it is, dear! Tell me what it is!"

"Oh, and I loved him so! I loved him!"

"I know it, dear; I knew it all along."

I thought her sobs would never cease till her heart was broken, so I questioned her again.

"Yes," she said, gaspingly, "yes, I loved him when Muireall and I were in the South together. I met him a month or more before ever she saw him. He loved me, and I promised to marry him: but I would not go

away with him as he wished: for he said his father would never agree. And then he was angry, and we quarrelled. And I—Oh! I was glad too, for I did not wish to marry an Englishman—or to live in a dreary city; but . . . but . . . and then he and Muireall met, and he gave all his thought to her; and she her love to him.”

“And now?”

“Now? . . . *Now* Muireall is dead.”

“Dead? O Morag, *dead*? Oh, poor Muireall that we loved so! But did you see her? was she alive when you reached her?”

“No; but she was alone. And now, listen. Here is a thing I have to tell you. When Ealasaid Cameron, that was my mother’s mother, was a girl, she had a cruel sorrow. She had two sisters whom she loved with all her heart. They were twins, Silis and Morag. One day an English officer at Fort William took Silis away with him as his wife; but when her child was heavy within her she discovered that she was no wife, for the man was already wedded to a woman in the South. She left him that night. It was bitter weather, and midwinter. She reached home through a wild

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snowdrift. It killed her; but before she died she said to Morag, 'He has killed me and the child.' And Morag understood. So it was that before any wind of spring blew upon that snow, the man was dead."

When Morag stopped here, and said no more, I did not at first realise what she meant to tell me. Then it flashed upon me.

"O Morag, Morag!" I exclaimed, terrified. "But, Morag, you do not . . . you will not. . . ."

"*Will* not?" she repeated, with a catch in her voice.

"Listen," she resumed suddenly after a long, strained silence. "While I lay beside my darling Muireall, weeping and moaning over her, and she so fair, with such silence where the laughter had always been, I heard the door open. I looked up: it was Jasper Morgan.

"'You are too late,' I said. I stared at the man who had brought her, and me, this sorrow. There was no light about him at all, as I had always thought. He was only a man as other men are, but with a cold selfish heart and loveless eyes.

“‘She sent for me to come back to her,’ he answered, though I saw his face grow ashy-grey as he looked at Muireall and saw that she was dead.

“‘She is dead, Jasper Morgan.’

“‘*Dead . . . Dead?*’

“‘Ay, dead. It is upon you, her death. Her you have slain, as though with your sword that you carry: her, and the child she bore within her, and that was yours.’

“At that he bit his lip till the blood came.

“‘It is a lie,’ he cried. ‘It is a lie, Morag. If she said that thing, she lied.’

“I laughed.

“‘Why do you laugh, Morag?’ he asked, in a swift anger.

“Once more I laughed.

“‘Why do you laugh like that, girl?’

“But I did not answer. ‘Come,’ I said, ‘come with me. I have something to say to you. You can do no good here now. She has taken poison, because of the shame and the sorrow.’

“‘Poison!’ he cried, in horror; and also, I could see in the poor cowardly mind of him, in a sudden sick fear.

"But when I rose to leave the room he made ready to follow me. I kissed Muireall for the last time. The man approached, as though to do likewise. I lifted my riding-whip. He bowed his head, with a deep flush on his face, and came out behind me.

"I told the inn-folk that my father would be over in the morning. Then I rode slowly away. Jasper Morgan followed on his horse, a grey stallion that Muireall and I had often ridden, for he was from Teenabrae farm.

"When we left the village it was into a deep darkness. The rain and the wind made the way almost impassable at times. But at last we came to the ford. The water was in spate, and the rushing sound terrified my horse. I dismounted, and fastened Gealcas to a tree. The man did the same.

"'What is it, Morag?' he asked in a quiet steady voice—'Death?'

"'Yes,' I said. 'Death.'

"Then he suddenly fell forward, and snatched my hand, and begged me to forgive him, swearing that he had loved me and me only, and imploring me to believe him, to love him, to . . . Ah, the *hound*!

"But all I said was this:

"'Jasper Morgan, soon or late I would kill you, because of this cruel wrong you did to her. But there is one way: best for *her* . . . best for *me* . . . best for *you*.'

"'What is that?' he said hoarsely, though I think he knew now. The roar of the Gorromalt Water filled the night.

"'There is one way. It is the only way. . . . Go!'

"He gave a deep quavering sigh. Then without word he turned, and walked straight into the darkness."

Morag paused here. Then, in answer to my frightened whisper, she added simply:

"They will find his body in the shallows. down by Drumdoon. The spate will carry it there."

After that we lay in silence. The rain had begun to fall again, and slid with a soft stealthy sound athwart the window. A dull light grew indiscernibly into the room. Then we heard someone move downstairs. In the yard, Angus, the stableman, began to pump

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water. A cow lowed, and the clattering of hens was audible.

I moved gently from Morag's side. As I rose, Maisie passed beneath the window on her way to the byre. As her wont was, poor wild wildered lass, she was singing fitfully. It was the same ballad again. But we heard a single verse only.

"For I have killed a man," she said,
"A better man than you to wed :
I slew him when he clasped my head,
And now he sleepeth with the dead."

Then the voice was lost in the byre, and in the sweet familiar lowing of the kine. The new day was come.

THE DAN-NAN-RON

NOTE

THIS story is founded upon a superstition familiar throughout the Hebrides. The legend exists in Ireland, too; for Mr Yeats tells me that last summer he met an old Connaught fisherman, who claimed to be of the Sliochd-nan-Ron—an ancestry, indeed, indicated in the man's name: Rooney.

As to my use of the fore-name 'Gloom' (in this story, in its sequel "Green Branches," and in "The Anointed Man"), I should explain that the designation is, of course, not a real name. At the same time, I have actual warrant for its use; for I knew a Uist man who, in the bitterness of his sorrow, after his wife's death in childbirth, named his son *Mulad* (*i.e.* the gloom of sorrow: grief).

THE DAN-NAN-RON

WHEN Anne Gillespie, that was my friend in Eilanmore, left the island after the death of her uncle, the old man Robert Achanna, it was to go far west.

Among the men of the outer isles who for three summers past had been at the fishing off Eilanmore, there was one named Mànus MacCodrum. He was a fine lad to see, but though most of the fisher-folk of the Lewis and North Uist are fair, either with reddish hair and grey eyes or blue-eyed and yellow-haired, he was of a brown skin with dark hair and dusky brown eyes. He was, however, as unlike to the dark Celts of Arran and the Inner Hebrides as to the Northmen. He came of his people, sure enough. All the MacCodrums of North Uist had been brown-skinned and brown-haired and brown-eyed; and herein may have lain the reason why, in bygone days, this small clan of Uist

was known throughout the Western Isles as the *Sliochd nan Ròn*, the offspring of the Seals.

Not so tall as most of the North Uist and Long Island men, Mànus MacCodrum was of a fair height and supple and strong. No man was a better fisherman than he, and he was well-liked of his fellows, for all the morose gloom that was upon him at times. He had a voice as sweet as a woman's when he sang, and he sang often, and knew all the old runes of the islands, from the Obb of Harris to the Head of Mingulay. Often, too, he chanted the beautiful *orain spioradail* of the Catholic priests and Christian Brothers of South Uist and Barra, though where he lived in North Uist he was the sole man who adhered to the ancient faith.

It may have been because Anne was a Catholic too, though, sure, the Achannas were so also, notwithstanding that their forebears and kindred in Galloway were Protestant (and this because of old Robert Achanna's love for his wife, who was of the old Faith, so it is said) — it may have been for this reason, though I think her lover's admiring eyes and

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soft speech and sweet singing had more to do with it, that she pledged her troth to MÀNUS. It was a south wind for him, as the saying is; for with her rippling brown hair and soft grey eyes and cream-white skin, there was no comelier lass in the Isles.

So when Achanna was laid to his long rest, and there was none left upon Eilanmore save only his three youngest sons, MÀNUS MacCodrum sailed north-eastward across the Minch to take home his bride. Of the four eldest sons, Alison had left Eilanmore some months before his father died, and sailed westward, though no one knew whither, or for what end, or for how long, and no word had been brought from him, nor was he ever seen again in the island, which had come to be called Eilan-nan-Allmharachain, the Isle of the Strangers. Allan and William had been drowned in a wild gale in the Minch; and Robert had died of the white fever, that deadly wasting disease which is the scourge of the Isles. Marcus was now "Eilanmore," and lived there with Gloom and Sheumais, all three unmarried, though it was rumoured among the neighbouring islanders that each

loved Marsail nic Ailpean,* in Eilean-Rona of the Summer Isles, hard by the coast of Sutherland.

When Mànus asked Anne to go with him she agreed. The three brothers were ill-pleased at this, for apart from their not wishing their cousin to go so far away, they did not want to lose her, as she not only cooked for them and did all that a woman does, including spinning and weaving, but was most sweet and fair to see, and in the long winter nights sang by the hour together, while Gloom played strange wild airs upon his *feadan*, a kind of oaten-pipe or flute.

She loved him, I know; but there was this reason also for her going, that she was afraid of Gloom. Often upon the moor or on the hill she turned and hastened home, because she heard the lilt and fall of that *feadan*. It was an eerie thing to her, to be going through the twilight when she thought the three men were in the house smoking after their supper, and suddenly to hear beyond and

* Marsail nic Ailpean is the Gaelic of which an English translation would be Marjory MacAlpine. *Nic* is a contraction for *nighean mhic*, "daughter of the line of."

coming towards her the shrill song of that oaten flute playing "The Dance of the Dead," or "The Flow and Ebb," or "The Shadow-Reel."

That, sometimes at least, he knew she was there was clear to her, because as she stole rapidly through the tangled fern and gale she would hear a mocking laugh follow her like a leaping thing.

Mànus was not there on the night when she told Marcus and his brothers that she was going. He was in the haven on board the *Luath*, with his two mates, he singing in the moonshine as all three sat mending their fishing gear.

After the supper was done, the three brothers sat smoking and talking over an offer that had been made about some Shetland sheep. For a time Anne watched them in silence. They were not like brothers, she thought. Marcus, tall, broad-shouldered, with yellow hair and strangely dark blue-black eyes and black eyebrows; stern, with a weary look on his sun-brown face. The light from the peats glinted upon the tawny curve of thick hair that trailed from his upper lip,

for he had the *caisean-feusag* of the Northmen. Gloom, slighter of build, dark of hue and hair, but with hairless face; with thin, white, long-fingered hands, that had ever a nervous motion as though they were tide-wrack. There was always a frown on the centre of his forehead, even when he smiled with his thin lips and dusky, unbetraying eyes. He looked what he was, the brain of the Achannas. Not only did he have the English as though native to that tongue, but could and did read strange unnecessary books. Moreover, he was the only son of Robert Achanna to whom the old man had imparted his store of learning; for Achanna had been a schoolmaster in his youth in Galloway, and he had intended Gloom for the priesthood. His voice, too, was low and clear, but cold as pale-green water running under ice. As for Sheumais, he was more like Marcus than Gloom, though not so fair. He had the same brown hair and shadowy hazel eyes, the same pale and smooth face, with something of the same intent look which characterised the long-time missing and probably dead eldest brother, Alison. He, too,

was tall and gaunt. On Sheumais' face there was that indescribable, as to some of course imperceptible, look which is indicated by the phrase, "the dusk of the shadow," though few there are who know what they mean by that, or, knowing, are fain to say.

Suddenly, and without any word or reason for it, Gloom turned and spoke to her.

"Well, Anne, and what is it?"

"I did not speak, Gloom."

"True for you, *mo cailinn*. But it's about to speak you were."

"Well, and that is true. Marcus, and you Gloom, and you Sheumais, I have that to tell which you will not be altogether glad for the hearing. 'Tis about . . . about . . . me and . . . and Mànus."

There was no reply at first. The three brothers sat looking at her, like the kye at a stranger on the moorland. There was a deepening of the frown on Gloom's brow, but when Anne looked at him his eyes fell and dwelt in the shadow at his feet. Then Marcus spoke in a low voice.

"Is it Mànus MacCodrum you will be meaning?"

"Ay, sure."

Again, silence. Gloom did not lift his eyes, and Sheumais was now staring at the peats. Marcus shifted uneasily.

"And what will Mànus MacCodrum be wanting?"

"Sure, Marcus, you know well what I mean. Why do you make this thing hard for me? There is but one thing he would come here wanting; and he has asked me if I will go with him, and I have said yes. And if you are not willing that he come again with the minister, or that we go across to the kirk in Berneray of Uist in the Sound of Harris, then I will not stay under this roof another night, but will go away from Eilanmore at sunrise in the *Luath*, that is now in the haven. And that is for the hearing and knowing, Marcus and Gloom and Sheumais!"

Once more, silence followed her speaking. It was broken in a strange way. Gloom slipped his *feadan* into his hands, and so to his mouth. The clear cold notes of the flute filled the flame-lit room. It was as though white polar birds were drifting before the coming of snow.

The notes slid into a wild remote air: cold moonlight on the dark o' the sea, it was. It was the *Dàn-nan-Ròn*.

Anne flushed, trembled, and then abruptly rose. As she leaned on her clenched right hand upon the table, the light of the peats showed that her eyes were aflame.

"Why do you play *that*, Gloom Achanna?"

The man finished the bar, then blew into the oaten pipe, before, just glancing at the girl, he replied:

"And what harm will there be in *that*, Anna-ban?"

"You know it is harm. That is the *Dàn-nan-Ròn*!"

"Ay; and what then, Anna-ban?"

"What then? Are you thinking I don't know what you mean by playing the Song of the Seal?"

With an abrupt gesture Gloom put the *feadan* aside. As he did so, he rose.

"See here, Anne," he began roughly—when Marcus intervened.

"That will do just now, Gloom. Ann-à-ghraidh, do you mean that you are going to do this thing?"

"Ay, sure."

"Do you know why Gloom played the Dàn-nan-Ròn?"

"It was a cruel thing."

"You know what is said in the isles about . . . about . . . this or that man, who is under *gheasan*—who is spell-bound . . . and . . . and . . . about the seals and . . . "

"Yes, Marcus, it is knowing it that I am: '*Tha iad a' cantuinn gur h-e daoine fo gheasan a th' anns no roin.*'"

"'*They say that seals,*'" he repeated slowly; "*'they say that seals are men under magic spells.'* And have you ever pondered that thing, Anne, my cousin?"

"I am knowing well what you mean."

"Then you will know that the MacCodrums of North Uist are called the Sliochd-nan-ròn?"

"I have heard."

"And would you be for marrying a man that is of the race of the beasts, and that himself knows what *geas* means, and may any day go back to his people?"

"Ah, now, Marcus, sure it is making a mock of me you are. Neither you nor any here believes that foolish thing. How can a man

born of a woman be a seal, even though his *sinnsear* were the offspring of the sea-people,—which is not a saying I am believing either, though it may be: and not that it matters much, whatever, about the far-back forebears.”

Marcus frowned darkly, and at first made no response. At last he answered, speaking sullenly.

“You may be believing this or you may be believing that, Anna-nic-Gilleasbuig, but two things are as well known as that the east wind brings the blight and the west wind the rain. And one is this: that long ago a Seal-man wedded a woman of North Uist, and that he or his son was called Neil MacCodrum; and that the sea-fever of the seal was in the blood of his line ever after. And this is the other: that twice within the memory of living folk a MacCodrum has taken upon himself the form of a seal, and has so met his death—once Neil MacCodrum of Ru’ Tormaid, and once Anndra MacCodrum of Berneray in the Sound. There’s talk of others, but these are known of us all. And you will not be forgetting now that Neil-donn was the grandfather, and that Anndra was the brother of the father of Mànus MacCodrum?”

"I am not caring what you say, Marcus: it is all foam of the sea."

"There's no foam without wind or tide, Anne. An' it's a dark tide that will be bearing you away to Uist; and a black wind that will be blowing far away behind the East, the wind that will be carrying his death-cry to your ears."

The girl shuddered. The brave spirit in her, however, did not quail.

"Well, so be it. To each his fate. But, seal or no seal, I am going to wed Mànus MacCodrum, who is a man as good as any here, and a true man at that, and the man I love, and that will be my man, God willing, the praise be His!"

Again Gloom took up the *feadan*, and sent a few cold white notes floating through the hot room, breaking suddenly into the wild fantastic opening air of the Dàn-nan-Ròn.

With a low cry and passionate gesture Anne sprang forward, snatched the oat-flute from his grasp, and would have thrown it in the fire. Marcus held her in an iron grip, however.

"Don't you be minding Gloom, Anne," he said quietly, as he took the *feadan* from her hand, and handed it to his brother; "sure,

he's only telling you in *his* way what I am telling you in mine."

She shook herself free, and moved to the other side of the table. On the opposite wall hung the dirk which had belonged to old Achanna. This she unfastened. Holding it in her right hand, she faced the three men.

"On the cross of the dirk I swear I will be the woman of MÀNUS MacCodrum."

The brothers made no response. They looked at her fixedly.

"And by the cross of the dirk I swear that if any man come between me and MÀNUS, this dirk will be for his remembering in a certain hour of the day of the days."

As she spoke, she looked meaningly at Gloom, whom she feared more than Marcus or Sheumais.

"And by the cross of the dirk I swear that if evil come to MÀNUS, this dirk will have another sheath, and that will be my milkless breast: and by that token I now throw the old sheath in the fire."

As she finished, she threw the sheath on to the burning peats.

Gloom quietly lifted it, brushed off the

sparks of flame as though they were dust, and put it in his pocket.

"And by the same token, Anne," he said, "your oaths will come to nought."

Rising, he made a sign to his brothers to follow. When they were outside he told Sheumais to return, and to keep Anne within, by peace if possible—by force if not. Briefly they discussed their plans, and then separated. While Sheumais went back, Marcus and Gloom made their way to the haven.

Their black figures were visible in the moonlight, but at first they were not noticed by the men on board the *Luath*, for Mànus was singing.

When the isleman stopped abruptly, one of his companions asked him jokingly if his song had brought a seal alongside, and bid him beware lest it was a woman of the sea-people.

He gloomed morosely, but made no reply. When the others listened, they heard the wild strain of the Dàn-nan-Ròn stealing through the moonshine. Staring against the shore, they could discern the two brothers.

"What will be the meaning of that?" asked one of the men uneasily.

"When a man comes instead of a woman," answered Mànus slowly, "the young corbies are astir in the nest."

So, it meant blood. Aulay MacNeill and Donull MacDonull put down their gear, rose, and stood waiting for what Mànus would do.

"Ho, there!" he cried.

"Ho-ro!"

"What will you be wanting, Eilanmore?"

"We are wanting a word of you, Mànus MacCodrum. Will you come ashore?"

"If you want a word of me, you can come to me."

"There is no boat here."

"I'll send the *bàta-beag*."

When he had spoken, Mànus asked Donull, the younger of his mates, a lad of seventeen, to row to the shore.

"And bring back no more than one man," he added, "whether it be Eilanmore himself or Gloom-mhic-Achanna."

The rope of the small boat was unfastened, and Donull rowed it swiftly through the moon-shine. The passing of a cloud dusked the shore, but they saw him throw a rope for the

guiding of the boat alongside the ledge of the landing-place; then the sudden darkening obscured the vision. Donull must be talking, they thought; for two or three minutes elapsed without sign: but at last the boat put off again, and with two figures only. Doubtless the lad had had to argue against the coming of both Marcus and Gloom.

This, in truth, was what Donull had done. But while he was speaking, Marcus was staring fixedly beyond him.

"Who is it that is there?" he asked; "there, in the stern?"

"There is no one there."

"I thought I saw the shadow of a man."

"Then it was my shadow, Eilanmore."

Achanna turned to his brother.

"I see a man's death there in the boat."

Gloom quailed for a moment, then laughed low.

"I see no death of a man sitting in the boat, Marcus; but if I did, I am thinking it would dance to the air of the Dàn-nan-Ròn, which is more than the wraith of you or me would do."

"It is not a wraith I was seeing, but the death of a man."

Gloom whispered, and his brother nodded

sullenly. The next moment a heavy muffler was round Donull's mouth, and before he could resist, or even guess what had happened, he was on his face on the shore, bound and gagged. A minute later the oars were taken by Gloom, and the boat moved swiftly out of the inner haven.

As it drew near through the gloom Mànus stared at it intently.

"That is not Donull that is rowing, Aulay!"

"No; it will be Gloom Achanna, I'm thinking."

MacCodrum started. If so, that other figure at the stern was too big for Donull. The cloud passed just as the boat came alongside. The rope was made secure, and then Marcus and Gloom sprang on board.

"Where is Donull MacDonull?" demanded Mànus sharply.

Marcus made no reply, so Gloom answered for him.

"He has gone up to the house with a message to Anna-nic-Gilleasbuig."

"And what will that message be?"

"That Mànus MacCodrum has sailed away from Eilanmore, and will not see her again."

MacCodrum laughed. It was a low, ugly laugh.

"Sure, Gloom Achanna, you should be taking that *feadan* of yours and playing the Codhail-nan-Pairtean, for I'm thinkin' the crabs are gathering about the rocks down below us, an' laughing wi' their claws."

"Well, and that is a true thing," Gloom replied, slowly and quietly. "Yes, for sure I might, as you say, be playing the Meeting of the Crabs. Perhaps," he added, as by a sudden afterthought, "perhaps, though it is a calm night, you will be hearing the *comh-thonn*. The 'slapping of the waves' is a better thing to be hearing than the Meeting of the Crabs."

"If I hear the *comh-thonn*, it is not in the way you will be meaning, Gloom 'ic Achanna. 'Tis not the 'up sail and good-bye' they will be saying, but 'Home wi' the Bride.'"

Here Marcus intervened.

"Let us be having no more words, Mànus MacCodrum. The girl Anne is not for you. Gloom is to be her man. So get you hence. If you will be going quiet, it is quiet we will be. If you have your feet on this thing, then

you will be having that too which I saw in the boat."

"And what was it you saw in the boat, Achanna?"

"The death of a man."

"So . . . And now" (this after a prolonged silence, wherein the four men stood facing each other), "is it a blood-matter, if not of peace?"

"Ay. Go, if you are wise. If not, 'tis your own death you will be making."

There was a flash as of summer lightning. A bluish flame seemed to leap through the moonshine. Marcus reeled, with a gasping cry; then, leaning back till his face blanched in the moonlight, his knees gave way. As he fell, he turned half round. The long knife which Mánus had hurled at him had not penetrated his breast more than two inches at most, but as he fell on the deck it was driven into him up to the hilt.

In the blank silence that followed, the three men could hear a sound like the ebb-tide in sea-weed. It was the gurgling of the bloody froth in the lungs of the dead man.

The first to speak was his brother, and

then only when thin reddish-white foam-bubbles began to burst from the blue lips of Marcus.

"It is murder."

He spoke low, but it was like the surf of breakers in the ears of those who heard.

"You have said one part of a true word, Gloom Achanna. It is murder . . . that you and he came here for."

"The death of Marcus Achanna is on you, Mànus MacCodrum."

"So be it, as between yourself and me, or between all of your blood and me; though Aulay MacNeill as well as you can witness that, though in self-defence I threw the knife at Achanna, it was his own doing that drove it into him."

"You can whisper that to the rope when it is round your neck."

"And what will *you* be doing now, Gloom-níc-Achanna?"

For the first time Gloom shifted uneasily. A swift glance revealed to him the awkward fact that the boat trailed behind the *Luath*, so that he could not leap into it; while if he turned to haul it close by the rope, he was at the mercy of the two men.

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"I will go in peace," he said quietly.

"Ay," was the answer, in an equally quiet tone: "in the white peace."

Upon this menace of death the two men stood facing each other.

Achanna broke the silence at last.

"You'll hear the Dàn-nan-Ròn the night before you die, Mànus MacCodrum: and, lest you doubt it, you'll hear it again in your death-hour."

"*Ma tha sìn an Dàn*—if that be ordained." Mànus spoke gravely. His very quietude, however, boded ill. There was no hope of clemency. Gloom knew that.

Suddenly he laughed scornfully. Then, pointing with his right hand as if to someone behind his two adversaries, he cried out: "Put the death-hand on them, Marcus! Give them the Grave!"

Both men sprang aside, the heart of each nigh upon bursting. The death-touch of the newly slain is an awful thing to incur, for it means that the wraith can transfer all its evil to the person touched.

The next moment there was a heavy splash. In a second Mànus realised that it was no

more than a ruse, and that Gloom had escaped. With feverish haste he hauled in the small boat, leaped into it, and began at once to row so as to intercept his enemy.

Achanna rose once, between him and the *Luath*. MacCodrum crossed the oars in the thole-pins, and seized the boat-hook.

The swimmer kept straight for him. Suddenly he dived. In a flash, Mànus realised that Gloom was going to rise under the boat, seize the keel, and upset him, and thus probably be able to grip him from above. There was time and no more to leap: and, indeed, scarce had he plunged into the sea ere the boat swung right over, Achanna clambering over it the next moment.

At first Gloom could not see where his foe was. He crouched on the upturned craft, and peered eagerly into the moonlit water. All at once a black mass shot out of the shadow between him and the smack. This black mass laughed: the same low, ugly laugh that had preceded the death of Marcus.

He who was in turn the swimmer was now close. When a fathom away he leaned back and began to tread water steadily. In his

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right hand he grasped the boat-hook. The man in the boat knew that to stay where he was meant certain death. He gathered himself together like a crouching cat. Mànus kept treading the water slowly, but with the hook ready so that the sharp iron spike at the end of it should transfix his foe if he came at him with a leap. Now and again he laughed. Then in his low sweet voice, but brokenly at times, between his deep breathings, he began to sing :

The tide was dark an' heavy with the burden that it bore,
I heard it talkin', whisperin', upon the weedy shore :
Each wave that stirred the sea-weed was like a closing door,
'Tis closing doors they hear at last who hear no more, no more,
My Grief,
No more !

The tide was in the salt sea-weed, and like a knife it tore ;
The wild sea-wind went moaning, sooling, moaning o'er and o'er ;
The deep sea-heart was brooding deep upon its ancient lore,
I heard the sob, the sooling sob, the dying sob at its core,
My Grief,
Its core !

The white sea-waves were wan and grey, its ashy lips before,
The yeast within its ravening mouth was red with streaming
gore—
O red sea-weed, O red sea-waves, O hollow baffled roar,
Since one thou hast, O dark, dim sea, why callest thou for more,
My Grief,
For more !

In the quiet moonlight the chant, with its long slow cadences, sung as no other man in the Isles could sing it, sounded sweet and remote beyond words to tell. The glittering shine was upon the water of the haven, and moved in waving lines of fire along the stone ledges. Sometimes a fish rose, and spilt a ripple of pale gold; or a sea-nettle swam to the surface, and turned its blue or greenish globe of living jelly to the moon dazzle.

The man in the water made a sudden stop in his treading, and listened intently. Then once more the phosphorescent light gleamed about his slow-moving shoulders. In a louder chanting voice came once again,

Each wave that stirs the sea-weed is like a closing door,
 'Tis closing doors they hear at last who hear no more, no more,
 My Grief,
 No more !

Yes, his quick ears had caught the inland strain of a voice he knew. Soft and white as the moonshine came Anne's singing, as she passed along the corrie leading to the haven. In vain his travelling gaze sought her: she was still in the shadow, and, besides, a slow drifting cloud obscured the moonlight. When

he looked back again, a stifled exclamation came from his lips. There was not a sign of Gloom Achanna. He had slipped noiselessly from the boat, and was now either behind it, or had dived beneath it, or was swimming under water this way or that. If only the cloud would sail by, muttered Mánus, as he held himself in readiness for an attack from beneath or behind. As the dusk lightened, he swam slowly towards the boat, and then swiftly round it. There was no one there. He climbed on to the keel, and stood, leaning forward as a salmon-leisterer by torchlight, with his spear - pointed boat - hook raised. Neither below nor beyond could he discern any shape. A whispered call to Aulay MacNeill showed that he, too, saw nothing. Gloom must have swooned, and sank deep as he slipped through the water. Perhaps the dog-fish were already darting about him.

Going behind the boat, Mánus guided it back to the smack. It was not long before, with MacNeill's help, he righted the punt. One oar had drifted out of sight, but as there was a sculling hole in the stern, that did not matter.

"What shall we do with it?" he muttered, as he stood at last by the corpse of Marcus. "This is a bad night for us, Aulay!"

"Bad it is; but let us be seeing it is not worse. I'm thinking we should have left the boat."

"And for why that?"

"We could say that Marcus Achanna and Gloom Achanna left us again, and that we saw no more of them nor of our boat."

MacCodrum pondered a while. The sound of voices, borne faintly across the water, decided him. Probably Anne and the lad Donull were talking. He slipped into the boat, and with a sail-knife soon ripped it here and there. It filled, and then, heavy with the weight of a great ballast-stone which Aulay had first handed to his companion, and surging with a foot-thrust from the latter, it sank.

"We'll hide the . . . the man there . . . behind the windlass, below the spare sail, till we're out at sea, Aulay. Quick, give me a hand!"

It did not take the two men long to lift

the corpse and do as Mànus had suggested. They had scarce accomplished this when Anne's voice came hailing silver-sweet across the water.

With death-white face and shaking limbs MacCodrum stood holding the mast, while with a loud voice so firm and strong that Aulay MacNeill smiled below his fear, he asked if the Achannas were back yet, and, if so, for Donull to row out at once, and she with him if she would come.

It was nearly half-an-hour thereafter that Anne rowed out towards the *Luath*. She had gone at last along the shore to a creek where one of Marcus' boats was moored, and returned with it. Having taken Donull on board, she made way with all speed, fearful lest Gloom or Marcus should intercept her.

It did not take long to explain how she had laughed at Sheumais' vain efforts to detain her, and had come down to the haven. As she approached, she heard Mànus singing, and so had herself broken into a song she knew he loved. Then, by the water-edge, she had come upon Donull lying upon his back, bound and gagged. After she had

released him, they waited to see what would happen, but as in the moonlight they could not see any small boat come in—bound to or from the smack—she had hailed to know if Mànus were there.

On his side, he said briefly that the two Achannas had come to persuade him to leave without her. On his refusal, they had departed again, uttering threats against her as well as himself. He heard their quarrelling voices as they rowed into the gloom, but could not see them at last because of the obscured moonlight.

“And now, Ann-mochree,” he added, “is it coming with me you are, and just as you are? Sure, you’ll never repent it, and you’ll have all you want that I can give. Dear of my heart, say that you will be coming away this night of the nights! By the Black Stone on Icolmkill I swear it, and by the Sun, and by the Moon, and by Himself!”

“I am trusting you, Mànus dear. Sure, it is not for me to be going back to that house after what has been done and said. I go with you, now and always, God save us.”

"Well, dear lass o' my heart, it's farewell to Eilanmore it is, for by the Blood on the Cross I'll never land on it again!"

"And that will be no sorrow to me, Mànus my home!"

And this was the way that my friend Anne Gillespie left Eilanmore to go to the isles of the west.

It was a fair sailing in the white moonshine with a whispering breeze astern. Anne leaned against Mànus, dreaming her dream. The lad Donull sat drowsing at the helm. Forward, Aulay MacNeill, with his face set against the moonshine to the west, brooded dark.

Though no longer was land in sight, and there was peace among the deeps of the quiet stars and upon the sea, the shadow of fear was upon the face of Mànus MacCodrum.

This might well have been because of the as yet unburied dead that lay beneath the spare sail by the windlass. The dead man, however, did not affright him. What went moaning in his heart, and sighing and calling in his brain, was a faint falling echo

he had heard as the *Luath* glided slow out of the haven. Whether from the water or from the shore he could not tell, but he heard the wild fantastic air of the Dàn-nan-Ròn, as he had heard it that very night upon the *feadan* of Gloom Achanna.

It was his hope that his ears had played him false. When he glanced about him and saw the sombre flame in the eyes of Aulay MacNeill, staring at him out of the dusk, he knew that which Oisín, the son of Fionn, cried in his pain: "his soul swam in mist."

II

FOR all the evil omens, the marriage of Anne and Mànus MacCodrum went well. He was more silent than of yore, and men avoided rather than sought him; but he was happy with Anne, and content with his two mates, who were now Callum MacCodrum and Ranald MacRanald. The youth Donull had bettered himself by joining a Skye skipper, who was a kinsman; and Aulay MacNeill had surprised everyone except Mànus by going away as

a seaman on board one of the *Loch* line of ships which sail for Australia from the Clyde.

Anne never knew what had happened, though it is possible she suspected somewhat. All that was known to her was that Marcus and Gloom Achanna had disappeared, and were supposed to have been drowned. There was now no Achanna upon Eilanmore, for Sheumáis had taken a horror of the place and his loneliness. As soon as it was commonly admitted that his two brothers must have drifted out to sea, and been drowned, or at best picked up by some ocean-going ship, he disposed of the island-farm, and left Eilanmore for ever. All this confirmed the thing said among the islanders of the West—that old Robert Achanna had brought a curse with him. Blight and disaster had visited Eilanmore over and over in the many years he had held it, and death, sometimes tragic or mysterious, had overtaken six of his seven sons, while the youngest bore upon his brows the “dusk of the shadow.” True, none knew for certain that three out of the six were dead, but few for a moment believed in the possibility that Alison and Marcus and Gloom

were alive. On the night when Anne had left the island with Mànus MacCodrum he, Sheumais, had heard nothing to alarm him. Even when, an hour after she had gone down to the haven, neither she nor his brothers had returned, and the *Luath* had put out to sea, he was not in fear of any ill. Clearly, Marcus and Gloom had gone away in the smack, perhaps determined to see that the girl was duly married by priest or minister. He would have perturbed himself little for days to come, but for a strange thing that happened that night. He had returned to the house because of a chill that was upon him, and convinced, too, that all had sailed in the *Luath*. He was sitting brooding by the peat-fire, when he was startled by a sound at the window at the back of the room. A few bars of a familiar air struck painfully upon his ear, though played so low that they were just audible. What could it be but the Dàn-nan-Ròn; and who would be playing that but Gloom? What did it mean? Perhaps, after all, it was fantasy only, and there was no *feadan* out there in the dark. He was pondering this when, still low, but louder and sharper than before, there

rose and fell the strain which he hated, and Gloom never played before him, that of the Dàvsa-na-mairv, the Dance of the Dead. Swiftly and silently he rose and crossed the room. In the dark shadows cast by the byre he could see nothing; but the music ceased. He went out, and searched everywhere, but found no one. So he returned, took down the Holy Book, and with awed heart read slowly, till peace came upon him, soft and sweet as the warmth of the peat-glow.

But as for Anne, she had never even this hint that one of the supposed dead might be alive; or that, being dead, Gloom might yet touch a shadowy *feadan* into a wild, remote air of the Grave.

When month after month went by, and no hint of ill came to break upon their peace, Mànus grew light-hearted again. Once more his songs were heard as he came back from the fishing or loitered ashore mending his nets. A new happiness was nigh to them, for Anne was with child. True, there was fear also, for the girl was not well at the time when her labour was near, and grew

weaker daily. There came a day when Mànus had to go to Loch Boisdale in South Uist ; and it was with pain, and something of foreboding, that he sailed away from Berneray in the Sound of Harris, where he lived. It was on the third night that he returned. He was met by Katreen MacRanald, the wife of his mate, with the news that, on the morrow after his going, Anne had sent for the priest, who was staying at Loch Maddy, for she had felt the coming of death. It was that very evening she died, and took the child with her.

Mànus heard as one in a dream. It seemed to him that the tide was ebbing in his heart, and a cold sleety rain falling, falling through a mist in his brain.

Sorrow lay heavily upon him. After the earthing of her whom he loved he went to and fro solitary ; often crossing the Narrows and going to the old Pictish Tower under the shadow of Ben Breac. He would not go upon the sea, but let his kinsman Callum do as he liked with the *Luath*.

Now and again Father Allan MacNeill sailed northward to see him. Each time he departed sadder. "The man is going mad,

I fear," he said to Callum, the last time he saw Mànus.

The long summer nights brought peace and beauty to the isles. It was a great herring-year, and the moon-fishing was unusually good. All the Uist men who lived by the sea-harvest were in their boats whenever they could. The pollack, the dogfish, the otters, and the seals, with flocks of sea-fowl beyond number, shared in the common joy. Mànus MacCodrum alone paid no need to herring or mackerel. He was often seen striding along the shore, and more than once had been heard laughing. Sometimes, too, he was come upon at low tide by the great Reef of Berneray, singing wild strange runes and songs, or crouching upon a rock and brooding dark.

The midsummer moon found no man on Berneray except MacCodrum, the Reverend Mr Black, the minister of the Free Kirk, and an old man named Anndra McIan. On the night before the last day of the middle month, Anndra was reproved by the minister for saying that he had seen a man rise out of one of the graves in the kirkyard, and steal down by the stone-dykes towards Balna-

hunnur-sa-mona,* where Mànus MacCodrum lived.

"The dead do not rise and walk, Anndra."

"That may be, maighstir; but it may have been the Watcher of the Dead. Sure, it is not three weeks since Padruic McAlistair was laid beneath the green mound. He'll be wearying for another to take his place."

"Hoots, man, that is an old superstition. The dead do not rise and walk, I tell you."

"It is right you may be, maighstir; but I heard of this from my father, that was old before you were young, and from his father before him. When the last buried is weary with being the Watcher of the Dead he goes about from place to place till he sees man, woman, or child with the death-shadow in the eyes, and then he goes back to his grave and lies down in peace, for his vigil it will be over now."

The minister laughed at the folly, and went into his house to make ready for the Sacrament that was to be on the morrow. Old Anndra, however, was uneasy. After the por-

* *Baillle-'na-aonar'sa mhonadh*, "the solitary farm on the hill-slope."

ridge he went down through the gloaming to Balnahunnur-sa-mona. He meant to go in and warn Mànus MacCodrum. But when he got to the west wall, and stood near the open window, he heard Mànus speaking in a loud voice, though he was alone in the room.

*"B'ionganntach do ghràdh dhomhsa, a' toirt barrachd air gràdh nam ban ! . . . "**

This Mànus cried in a voice quivering with pain. Anndra stopped still, fearful to intrude, fearful also, perhaps, to see someone there beside MacCodrum whom eyes should not see. Then the voice rose into a cry of agony.

"Aoram dhuit, ay an dèigh dhomh fàs aosda !" †

With that Anndra feared to stay. As he passed the byre he started, for he thought he saw the shadow of a man. When he looked closer he could see nought, so went his way trembling and sore troubled.

It was dusk when Mànus came out. He saw that it was to be a cloudy night, and

* "Thy love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women."

† "I shall worship thee, ay even after I have become old."

perhaps it was this that, after a brief while, made him turn in his aimless walk and go back to the house. He was sitting before the flaming heart of the peats, brooding in his pain, when, suddenly, he sprang to his feet.

Loud and clear, and close as though played under the very window of the room, came the cold white notes of an oaten flute. Ah, too well he knew that wild fantastic air. Who could it be but Gloom Achanna, playing upon his *feadan*; and what air of all airs could that be but the Dàn-nan-Ròn?

Was it the dead man, standing there unseen in the shadow of the grave? Was Marcus beside him—Marcus with the knife still thrust up to the hilt, and the lung-foam upon his lips? Can the sea give up its dead? Can there be strain of any *feadan* that ever was made of man—there in the Silence?

In vain Mànus MacCodrum tortured himself thus. Too well he knew that he had heard the Dàn-nan-Ròn, and that no other than Gloom Achanna was the player.

Suddenly an access of fury wrought him to madness. With an abrupt lilt the tune swung

into the Dava-na-mairv, and thence, after a few seconds, and in a moment, into that mysterious and horrible *Codhail-nan-Pairtean* which none but Gloom played.

There could be no mistake now, nor as to what was meant by the muttering, jerking air of the "Gathering of the Crabs."

With a savage cry Mànus snatched up a long dirk from its place by the chimney, and rushed out.

There was not the shadow of a sea-gull even in front: so he sped round by the byre. Neither was anything unusual discoverable there.

"Sorrow upon me," he cried; "man or wraith, I will be putting it to the dirk!"

But there was no one; nothing; not a sound.

Then, at last, with a listless droop of his arms, MacCodrum turned and went into the house again. He remembered what Gloom Achanna had said: "*You'll hear the Dàn-nan-Ròn the night before you die, Mànus MacCodrum, and lest you doubt it, you'll hear it in your death-hour.*"

He did not stir from the fire for three

hours; then he rose, and went over to his bed and lay down without undressing.

He did not sleep, but lay listening and watching. The peats burned low, and at last there was scarce a flicker along the floor. Outside he could hear the wind moaning upon the sea. By a strange rustling sound he knew that the tide was ebbing across the great reef that runs out from Berneray. By midnight the clouds had gone. The moon shone clear and full. When he heard the clock strike in its worm-eaten, rickety case, he sat up, and listened intently. He could hear nothing. No shadow stirred. Surely if the wraith of Gloom Achanna were waiting for him it would make some sign, now, in the dead of night.

An hour passed. Mànus rose, crossed the room on tip-toe, and soundlessly opened the door. The salt-wind blew fresh against his face. The smell of the shore, of wet seawrack and pungent gale, of foam and moving water, came sweet to his nostrils. He heard a skua calling from the rocky promontory. From the slopes behind, the wail of a moon-restless lapwing rose and fell mournfully.

Crouching, and with slow, stealthy step, he stole round by the seaward wall. At the dyke he stopped, and scrutinised it on each side. He could see for several hundred yards, and there was not even a sheltering sheep. Then, soundlessly as ever, he crept close to the byre. He put his ear to chink after chink ; but not a stir of a shadow even. As a shadow, himself, he drifted lightly to the front, past the hay-rick : then, with swift glances to right and left, opened the door and entered. As he did so, he stood as though frozen. Surely, he thought, that was a sound as of a step, out there by the hay-rick. A terror was at his heart. In front, the darkness of the byre, with God knows what dread thing awaiting him : behind, a mysterious walker in the night, swift to take him unawares. The trembling that came upon him was nigh overmastering. At last, with a great effort, he moved towards the ledge, where he kept a candle. With shaking hand he struck a light. The empty byre looked ghostly and fearsome in the flickering gloom. But there was no one, nothing. He was about to turn, when a rat ran along a loose hanging beam, and stared at him, or

at the yellow shine. He saw its black eyes shining like peat-water in moonlight.

The creature was curious at first, then indifferent. At least, it began to squeak, and then make a swift scratching with its fore-paws. Once or twice came an answering squeak: a faint rustling was audible here and there among the straw.

With a sudden spring Mànus seized the beast. Even in the second in which he raised it to his mouth, and scrunched its back with his strong teeth, it bit him severely. He let his hands drop, and grope furtively in the darkness. With stooping head he shook the last breath out of the rat, holding it with his front teeth, with back-curved lips. The next moment he dropped the dead thing, trampled upon it, and burst out laughing. There was a scurrying of pattering feet, a rustling of straw. Then silence again. A draught from the door had caught the flame and extinguished it. In the silence and darkness MacCodrum stood, intent but no longer afraid. He laughed again, because it was so easy to kill with the teeth. The noise of his laughter seemed to him to leap hither and thither like a shadowy

ape. He could see it: a blackness within the darkness. Once more he laughed. It amused him to see the *thing* leaping about like that.

Suddenly he turned, and walked out into the moonlight. The lapwing was still circling and wailing. He mocked it, with loud, shrill *pēē-wēēty, pēē-wēēty, pēē-wēēt*. The bird swung waywardly, alarmed: its abrupt cry, and dancing flight, aroused its fellows. The air was full of the lamentable crying of plovers.

A sough of the sea came inland. Mānus inhaled its breath with a sigh of delight. A passion for the running wave was upon him. He yearned to feel green water break against his breast. Thirst and hunger, too, he felt at last, though he had known neither all day. How cool and sweet, he thought, would be a silver haddock, or even a brown-backed liath, alive and gleaming wet with the sea-water still bubbling in its gills. It would writhe, just like the rat; but then how he would throw his head back, and toss the glittering thing up into the moonlight, catch it on the downwhirl just as it neared the wave on whose crest he was, and then devour it with swift voracious gulps!

With quick jerky steps he made his way past the landward side of the small thatched-roofed cottage. He was about to enter, when he noticed that the door, which he had left ajar, was closed. He stole to the window and glanced in.

A single thin, wavering moonbeam flickered in the room. But the flame at the heart of the peats had worked its way through the the ash, and there was now a dull glow, though that was within the "smoorings," and threw scarce more than a glimmer into the room.

There was enough light, however, for Mànus MacCodrum to see that a man sat on the three-legged stool before the fire. His head was bent, as though he were listening. The face was away from the window. It was his own wraith, of course—of that Mànus felt convinced. What was it doing there? Perhaps it had eaten the Holy Book, so that it was beyond his putting a *rosad* on it! At the thought, he laughed loud. The shadow-man leaped to his feet.

The next moment MacCodrum swung himself on to the thatched roof, and clambered

from rope to rope, where these held down the big stones which acted as dead-weight for the thatch against the fury of tempests. Stone after stone he tore from its fastenings, and hurled to the ground over and beyond the door. Then, with tearing hands, he began to burrow an opening in the thatch. All the time he whined like a beast.

He was glad the moon shone full upon him. When he had made a big enough hole, he would see the evil thing out of the grave that sat in his room, and would stone it to death.

Suddenly he became still. A cold sweat broke out upon him. The *thing*, whether his own wraith, or the spirit of his dead foe, or Gloom Achanna himself, had begun to play, low and slow, a wild air. No piercing cold music like that of the *feadan*! Too well he knew it, and those cool white notes that moved here and there in the darkness like snowflakes. As for the air, though he slept till Judgment Day and heard but a note of it amidst all the clamour of heaven and hell, sure he would scream because of the Dàn-nan-Ròn!

The Dàn-nan-Ròn: the *Roin*! the Seals! Ah, what was he doing there, on the bitter-weary land! Out there was the sea. Safe would he be in the green waves.

With a leap he was on the ground. Seizing a huge stone he hurled it through the window. Then, laughing and screaming, he fled towards the Great Reef, along whose sides the ebb-tide gurgled and sobbed, with glistering white foam.

He ceased screaming or laughing as he heard the Dàn-nan-Ron behind him, faint, but following; sure, following. Bending low, he raced towards the rock-ledges from which ran the reef.

When at last he reached the extreme ledge, he stopped abruptly. Out on the reef he saw from ten to twenty seals, some swimming to and fro, others clinging to the reef, one or two making a curious barking sound, with round heads lifted against the moon. In one place there was a surge and lashing of water. Two bulls were fighting to the death.

With swift stealthy movements Mânus unclothed himself. The damp had clotted the

leathern thongs of his boots, and he snarled with curled lip as he tore at them. He shone white in the moonshine, but was sheltered from the sea by the ledge behind which he crouched. "What did Gloom Achanna mean by that," he muttered savagely, as he heard the nearing air change into the "Dance of the Dead." For a moment M`anus was a man again. He was nigh upon turning to face his foe, corpse or wraith or living body, to spring at this thing which followed him, and tear it with hands and teeth. Then, once more, the hated Song of the Seal stole mockingly through the night.

With a shiver he slipped into the dark water. Then, with quick, powerful strokes, he was in the moon-flood, and swimming hard against it out by the leese of the reef.

So intent were the seals upon the fight of the two great bulls that they did not see the swimmer, or, if they did, took him for one of their own people. A savage snarling and barking and half-human crying came from them. M`anus was almost within reach of the nearest, when one of the com-

batants sank dead, with torn throat. The victor clambered on to the reef, and leaned high, swaying its great head and shoulders to and fro. In the moonlight its white fangs were like red coral. Its blinded eyes ran with gore.

There was a rush, a rapid leaping and swirling, as Mànus surged in among the seals, which were swimming round the place where the slain bull had sunk.

The laughter of this long white seal terrified them.

When his knee struck against a rock, MacCodrum groped with his arms and hauled himself out of the water.

From rock to rock and ledge to ledge he went, with a fantastic dancing motion, his body gleaming foam-white in the moon-shine.

As he pranced and trampled along the weedy ledges, he sang snatches of an old rune—the lost rune of the MacCodrums of Uist. The seals on the rocks crouched spell-bound: those slow-swimming in the water stared with brown unwinking eyes, with their small ears strained against the sound:—

110 THE . DAN - NAN - RON

It is I, Mânus MacCodrum,
 I am telling you that, you, Anndra of my blood,
 And you, Neil my grandfather, and you, and you, and you!
 Ay, ay, Mânus my name is, Mânus MacMânus!
 It is I myself, and no other,
 Your brother, O Seals of the Sea!
 Give me blood of the red fish,
 And a bite of the flying sgadan:
 The green wave on my belly,
 And the foam in my eyes!
 I am your bull-brother, O Bulls of the Sea,
 Bull-better than any of you, snarling bulls!
 Come to me, mate, seal of the soft furry womb,
 White am I still, though red shall I be,
 Red with the streaming red blood if any dispute me!
 Aoh, aoh, aoh, arò, arò, ho-rò!
 A man was I, a seal am I,
 My fangs churn the yellow foam from my lips:
 Give way to me, give way to me, Seals of the Sea;
 Give way, for I am fëy of the sea
 And the sea-maiden I see there,
 And my name, true, is Mânus MacCodrum,
 The bull-seal that was a man, Arà! Arà!

By this time he was close upon the great black seal, which was still monotonously swaying its gory head, with its sightless eyes rolling this way and that. The sea-folk seemed fascinated. None moved, even when the dancer in the moonshine trampled upon them.

When he came within arm-reach he stopped.
 "Are you the Ceann-Cinnidh?" he cried.

"Are you the head of this clan of the sea-folk?"

The huge beast ceased its swaying. Its curled lips moved from its fangs.

"Speak, Seal, if there's no curse upon you! Maybe, now, you'll be Anndra himself, the brother of my father! Speak! *H'st — are you hearing that music on the shore!* 'Tis the Dàn-nan-Ròn! Death o' my soul, it's the Dàn-nan-Ròn! Aha, 'tis Gloom Achanna out of the Grave. Back, beast, and let me move on!"

With that, seeing the great bull did not move, he struck it full in the face with clenched fist. There was a hoarse strangling roar, and the seal champion was upon him with lacerating fangs.

Mànus swayed this way and that. All he could hear now was the snarling and growling and choking cries of the maddened seals. As he fell, they closed in upon him. His screams wheeled through the night like mad birds. With desperate fury he struggled to free himself. The great bull pinned him to the rock; a dozen others tore at his white flesh, till his spouting blood made the

rocks scarlet in the white shine of the moon.

For a few seconds he still fought savagely, tearing with teeth and hands. Once, only, a wild cry burst from his lips: when from the shore end of the reef came loud and clear the lilt of the rune of his fate.

The next moment he was dragged down and swept from the reef into the sea. As the torn and mangled body disappeared from sight, it was amid a seething crowd of leaping and struggling seals, their eyes wild with affright and fury, their fangs red with human gore.

And Gloom Achanna, turning upon the reef, moved swiftly inland, playing low on his *feadan* as he went.

THE SIN-EATER

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NOTE

It should be explained that the sin-relinquishing superstition — a superstition probably pre - Celtic, perhaps of the remotest antiquity — hardly exists to-day, or, if at all, in its crudest guise. The last time I heard of it, even in a modified form, was not in the west, but in a remote part of the Aberdeenshire highlands. Then, it was salt, not bread, that was put on the breast of the dead: and the salt was thrown away, nor was any wayfarer called upon to perform this or any other function.

THE SIN-EATER

SIN.

*Taste this bread, this substance : tell me
Is it bread or flesh ?*

[*The Senses approach.*]

THE SMELL.

*Its smell
Is the smell of bread.*

SIN.

*Touch, come. Why tremble ?
Say what's this thou touchest ?*

THE TOUCH.

Bread.

SIN.

*Sight, declare what thou discernest
In this object.*

THE SIGHT.

Bread alone.

CALDERON,
Los Encantos de la Culpa.

A WET wind out of the south mazed and mooned through the sea-mist that hung over the Ross. In all the bays and creeks was a continuous weary lapping of water. There was no other sound anywhere.

Thus was it at daybreak: it was thus at noon: thus was it now in the darkening of the day. A confused thrusting and falling of sounds through the silence betokened the hour of the setting. Curlews wailed in the mist: on the seething limpet-covered rocks the skuas and terns screamed, or uttered hoarse, rasping cries. Ever and again the prolonged note of the oyster-catcher shrilled against the air, as an echo flying blindly along a blank wall of cliff. Out of weedy places, wherein the tide sobbed with long, gurgling moans, came at intervals the barking of a seal.

Inland, by the hamlet of Contullich, there is a reedy tarn called the Loch-a-chaoruinn.* By the shores of this mournful water a man moved. It was a slow, weary walk that of the man Neil Ross. He had come from Duninch, thirty miles to the eastward, and had not rested foot, nor eaten, nor had word of man or woman, since his going west an hour after dawn.

At the bend of the loch nearest the clachan

* *Contullich*: i.e. Ceann-nan-tulaich, "the end of the hillocks."
Loch-a-chaoruinn means the loch of the rowan-trees.

he came upon an old woman carrying peat. To his reiterated question as to where he was, and if the tarn were Feur-Lochan above Fionnaphort that is on the strait of Iona on the west side of the Ross of Mull, she did not at first make any answer. The rain trickled down her withered brown face, over which the thin grey locks hung limply. It was only in the deep-set eyes that the flame of life still glimmered, though that dimly.

The man had used the English when first he spoke, but as though mechanically. Supposing that he had not been understood, he repeated his question in the Gaelic.

After a minute's silence the old woman answered him in the native tongue, but only to put a question in return.

"I am thinking it is a long time since you have been in Iona?"

The man stirred uneasily.

"And why is that, mother?" he asked, in a weak voice hoarse with damp and fatigue; "how is it you will be knowing that I have been in Iona at all?"

"Because I knew your kith and kin there, Neil Ross."

"I have not been hearing that name, mother, for many a long year. And as for the old face o' you, it is unbeknown to me."

"I was at the naming of you, for all that. Well do I remember the day that Silis Macallum gave you birth; and I was at the house on the croft of Ballyrona when Murtagh Ross—that was your father—laughed. It was an ill laughing that."

"I am knowing it. The curse of God on him!"

"'Tis not the first, nor the last, though the grass is on his head three years ago now."

"You that know who I am will be knowing that I have no kith or kin now on Iona?"

"Ay; they are all under grey stone or running wave. Donald your brother, and Murtagh your next brother, and little Silis, and your mother Silis herself, and your two brothers of your father, Angus and Ian Macallum, and your father Murtagh Ross, and his lawful childless wife, Dionaid, and his sister Anna—one and all, they lie beneath the green wave or in the brown mould. It is said there is a curse upon all who live

at Ballyrona. The owl builds now in the rafters, and it is the big sea-rat that runs across the fireless hearth."

"It is there I am going."

"The foolishness is on you, Neil Ross."

"Now it is that I am knowing who you are. It is old Sheen Macarthur I am speaking to."

"*Tha mise* . . . it is I."

"And you will be alone now, too, I am thinking, Sheen?"

"I am alone. God took my three boys at the one fishing ten years ago; and before there was moonrise in the blackness of my heart my man went. It was after the drowning of Anndra that my croft was taken from me. Then I crossed the Sound, and shared with my widow sister Elsie McVurie: till *she* went: and then the two cows had to go: and I had no rent: and was old."

In the silence that followed, the rain dribbled from the sodden bracken and dripping lone-roid. Big tears rolled slowly down the deep lines on the face of Sheen. Once there was a sob in her throat, but she put her shaking hand to it, and it was still.

Neil Ross shifted from foot to foot. The ooze in that marshy place squelched with each restless movement he made. Beyond them a plover wheeled, a blurred splash in the mist, crying its mournful cry over and over and over.

It was a pitiful thing to hear: ah, bitter loneliness, bitter patience of poor old women. That he knew well. But he was too weary, and his heart was nigh full of its own burthen. The words could not come to his lips. But at last he spoke.

"Tha mo chridhe goirt," he said, with tears in his voice, as he put his hand on her bent shoulder; "my heart is sore."

She put up her old face against his.

"'S tha e ruidhinn mo chridhe," she whispered; "it is touching my heart you are."

After that they walked on slowly through the dripping mist, each dumb and brooding deep.

"Where will you be staying this night?" asked Sheen suddenly, when they had traversed a wide boggy stretch of land; adding, as by an afterthought—"Ah, it is asking you were if the tarn there were Feur-Lochan.

No; it is Loch-a-chaoruinn, and the clachan that is near is Contullich."

"Which way?"

"Yonder: to the right."

"And you are not going there?"

"No. I am going to the steading of Andrew Blair. Maybe you are for knowing it? It is called the Baile-na-Chlais-nambuidheag."*

"I do not remember. But it is remembering a Blair I am. He was Adam, the son of Adam, the son of Robert. He and my father did many an ill deed together."

"Ay, to the stones be it said. Sure, now, there was, even till this weary day, no man or woman who had a good word for Adam Blair."

"And why that . . . why till this day?"

"It is not yet the third hour since he went into the silence."

Neil Ross uttered a sound like a stifled curse. For a time he trudged wearily on.

"Then I am too late," he said at last, but as though speaking to himself. "I had hoped to see him face to face again, and curse him between the eyes. It was he who made

* The farm in the hollow of the yellow flowers.

Murtagh Ross break his troth to my mother, and marry that other woman, barren at that, God be praised! And they say ill of him, do they?"

"Ay, it is evil that is upon him. This crime and that, God knows; and the shadow of murder on his brow and in his eyes. Well, well, 'tis ill to be speaking of a man in corpse, and that near by. 'Tis Himself only that knows, Neil Ross."

"Maybe ay and maybe no. But where is it that I can be sleeping this night, Sheen Macarthur?"

"They will not be taking a stranger at the farm this night of the nights, I am thinking. There is no place else for seven miles yet, when there is the clachan, before you will be coming to Fionnaphort. There is the warm byre, Neil, my man; or, if you can bide by my peats, you may rest, and welcome, though there is no bed for you, and no food either save some of the porridge that is over."

"And that will do well enough for me, Sheen; and Himself bless you for it."

And so it was.

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After old Sheen Macarthur had given the wayfarer food—poor food at that, but welcome to one nigh starved, and for the heartsome way it was given, and because of the thanks to God that was upon it before even spoon was lifted—she told him a lie. It was the good lie of tender love.

“Sure now, after all, Neil, my man,” she said, “it is sleeping at the farm I ought to be, for Maisie Macdonald, the wise woman, will be sitting by the corpse, and there will be none to keep her company. It is there I must be going; and if I am weary, there is a good bed for me just beyond the dead-board, which I am not minding at all. So, if it is tired you are sitting by the peats, lie down on my bed there, and have the sleep; and God be with you.”

With that she went, and soundlessly, for Neil Ross was already asleep, where he sat on an upturned *claar*, with his elbows on his knees, and his flame-lit face in his hands.

The rain had ceased; but the mist still hung over the land, though in thin veils now, and these slowly drifting seaward. Sheen stepped wearily along the stony path that

led from her bothy to the farm-house. She stood still once, the fear upon her, for she saw three or four blurred yellow gleams moving beyond her, eastward, along the dyke. She knew what they were—the corpse-lights that on the night of death go between the bier and the place of burial. More than once she had seen them before the last hour, and by that token had known the end to be near.

Good Catholic that she was, she crossed herself, and took heart. Then, muttering

*Crois nan naoi aingeal leam
'O mhullach mo chinn
Gu craicán mo bhonn*

(The cross of the nine angels be about me,
From the top of my head
To the soles of my feet),

she went on her way fearlessly.

When she came to the White House, she entered by the milk-shed that was between the byre and the kitchen. At the end of it was a paved place, with washing-tubs. At one of these stood a girl that served in the house,—an ignorant lass called Jessie McFall, out of Oban. She was ignorant, indeed, not to know that to wash clothes with a newly

dead body near by was an ill thing to do. Was it not a matter for the knowing that the corpse could hear, and might rise up in the night and clothe itself in a clean white shroud?

She was still speaking to the lassie when Maisie Macdonald, the deid-watcher, opened the door of the room behind the kitchen to see who it was that was come. The two old women nodded silently. It was not till Sheen was in the closed room, midway in which something covered with a sheet lay on a board, that any word was spoken.

"Duit slth mòr, Beann Macdonald."

"And deep peace to you, too, Sheen; and to him that is there."

"Och, ochone, mise 'n diugh; 'tis a dark hour this."

"Ay; it is bad. Will you have been hearing or seeing anything?"

"Well, as for that, I am thinking I saw lights moving betwixt here and the green place over there."

"The corpse-lights?"

"Well, it is calling them that they are."

"I *thought* they would be out. And I have been hearing the noise of the planks—the

cracking of the boards, you know, that will be used for the coffin to-morrow."

A long silence followed. The old women had seated themselves by the corpse, their cloaks over their heads. The room was fireless, and was lit only by a tall wax death-candle, kept against the hour of the going.

At last Sheen began swaying slowly to and fro, crooning low the while. "I would not be for doing that, Sheen Macarthur," said the deid-watcher in a low voice, but meaningly; adding, after a moment's pause, "*The mice have all left the house.*"

Sheen sat upright, a look half of terror half of awe in her eyes.

"God save the sinful soul that is hiding," she whispered.

Well she knew what Maisie meant. If the soul of the dead be a lost soul it knows its doom. The house of death is the house of sanctuary; but before the dawn that follows the death-night the soul must go forth, whosoever or whatsoever wait for it in the homeless, shelterless plains of air around and beyond. If it be well with the soul, it need have no fear: if it be not ill with the soul, it may

fare forth with surety; but if it be ill with the soul, ill will the going be. Thus is it that the spirit of an evil man cannot stay, and yet dare not go; and so it strives to hide itself in secret places anywhere, in dark channels and blind walls; and the wise creatures that live near man smell the terror, and flee. Maisie repeated the saying of Sheen; then, after a silence, added—

“Adam Blair will not lie in his grave for a year and a day because of the sins that are upon him; and it is knowing that, they are, here. He will be the Watcher of the Dead for a year and a day.”

“Ay, sure, there will be dark prints in the dawn-dew over yonder.”

Once more the old women relapsed into silence. Through the night there was a sighing sound. It was not the sea, which was too far off to be heard save in a day of storm. The wind it was, that was dragging itself across the sodden moors like a wounded thing, moaning and sighing.

Out of sheer weariness, Sheen twice rocked forward from her stool, heavy with sleep. At last Maisie led her over to the niche-bed

opposite, and laid her down there, and waited till the deep furrows in the face relaxed somewhat, and the thin breath laboured slow across the fallen jaw.

"Poor old woman," she muttered, heedless of her own grey hairs and greyer years; "a bitter, bad thing it is to be old, old and weary. 'Tis the sorrow, that. God keep the pain of it!"

As for herself, she did not sleep at all that night, but sat between the living and the dead, with her plaid shrouding her. Once, when Sheen gave a low, terrified scream in her sleep, she rose, and in a loud voice cried, "*Sheeach-ad! Away with you!*" And with that she lifted the shroud from the dead man, and took the pennies off the eyelids, and lifted each lid; then, staring into these filmed wells, muttered an ancient incantation that would compel the soul of Adam Blair to leave the spirit of Sheen alone, and return to the cold corpse that was its coffin till the wood was ready.

The dawn came at last. Sheen slept, and Adam Blair slept a deeper sleep, and Maisie stared out of her wan, weary eyes against the red and stormy flares of light that came into the sky.

When, an hour after sunrise, Sheen Macarthur reached her bothy, she found Neil Ross, heavy with slumber, upon her bed. The fire was not out, though no flame or spark was visible; but she stooped and blew at the heart of the peats till the redness came, and once it came it grew. Having done this, she kneeled and said a rune of the morning, and after that a prayer, and then a prayer for the poor man Neil. She could pray no more because of the tears. She rose and put the meal and water into the pot for the porridge to be ready against his awaking. One of the hens that was there came and pecked at her ragged skirt. "Poor beastie," she said. "Sure, that will just be the way I am pulling at the white robe of the Mother o' God. 'Tis a bit meal for you, cluckie, and for me a healing hand upon my tears. O, och, ochone, the tears, the tears!"

It was not till the third hour after sunrise of that bleak day in that winter of the winters, that Neil Ross stirred and arose. He ate in silence. Once he said that he smelt the snow coming out of the north. Sheen said no word at all.

After the porridge, he took his pipe, but

there was no tobacco. All that Sheen had was the pipeful she kept against the gloom of the Sabbath. It was her one solace in the long weary week. She gave him this, and held a burning peat to his mouth, and hungered over the thin, rank smoke that curled upward.

It was within half-an-hour of noon that, after an absence, she returned.

"Not between you and me, Neil Ross," she began abruptly, "but just for the asking, and what is beyond. Is it any money you are having upon you?"

"No."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Then how will you be getting across to Iona? It is seven long miles to Fionnaphort, and bitter cold at that, and you will be needing food, and then the ferry, the ferry across the Sound, you know."

"Ay, I know."

"What would you do for a silver piece, Neil, my man?"

"You have none to give me, Sheen Macarthur; and, if you had, it would not be taking it I would."

"Would you kiss a dead man for a crown-piece—a crown-piece of five good shillings?"

Neil Ross stared. Then he sprang to his feet.

"It is Adam Blair you are meaning, woman! God curse him in death now that he is no longer in life!"

Then, shaking and trembling, he sat down again, and brooded against the dull red glow of the peats.

But, when he rose, in the last quarter before noon, his face was white.

"The dead are dead, Sheen Macarthur. They can know or do nothing. I will do it. It is willed. Yes, I am going up to the house there. And now I am going from here. God Himself has my thanks to you, and my blessing too. They will come back to you. It is not forgetting you I will be. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Neil, son of the woman that was my friend. A south wind to you! Go up by the farm. In the front of the house you will see what you will be seeing. Maisie Macdonald will be there. She will tell you what's for the telling. There is no harm in it, sure : sure, the dead are dead. It is praying for you I will be, Neil Ross. Peace to you!"

"And to you, Sheen."

And with that the man went.

When Neil Ross reached the byres of the farm in the wide hollow, he saw two figures standing as though awaiting him, but separate, and unseen of the other. In front of the house was a man he knew to be Andrew Blair; behind the milk-shed was a woman he guessed to be Maisie Macdonald.

It was the woman he came upon first.

"Are you the friend of Sheen Macarthur?" she asked in a whisper, as she beckoned him to the doorway.

"I am."

"I am knowing no names or anything. And no one here will know you, I am thinking. So do the thing and begone."

"There is no harm to it?"

"None."

"It will be a thing often done, is it not?"

"Ay, sure."

"And the evil does not abide?"

"No. The . . . the . . . person . . . the person takes them away, and . . ."

"*Them?*"

"For sure, man! Them . . . the sins of the corpse. He takes them away; and are you for thinking God would let the innocent suffer for the guilty? No . . . the person . . . the Sin-Eater, you know . . . takes them away on himself, and one by one the air of heaven washes them away till he, the Sin-Eater, is clean and whole as before."

"But if it is a man you hate . . . if it is a corpse that is the corpse of one who has been a curse and a foe . . . if . . ."

"*Sst!* Be still now with your foolishness. It is only an idle saying, I am thinking. Do it, and take the money and go. It will be hell enough for Adam Blair, miser as he was, if he is for knowing that five good shillings of his money are to go to a passing tramp because of an old, ancient silly tale."

Neil Ross laughed low at that. It was for pleasure to him.

"Hush wi' ye! Andrew Blair is waiting round there. Say that I have sent you round, as I have neither bite nor bit to give."

Turning on his heel, Neil walked slowly round to the front of the house. A tall man was there, gaunt and brown, with hairless face

and lank brown hair, but with eyes cold and grey as the sea.

"Good day to you, an' good faring. Will you be passing this way to anywhere?"

"Health to you. I am a stranger here. It is on my way to Iona I am. But I have the hunger upon me. There is not a brown bit in my pocket. I asked at the door there, near the byres. The woman told me she could give me nothing—not a penny even, worse luck,—nor, for that, a drink of warm milk. 'Tis a sore land this."

"You have the Gaelic of the Isles. Is it from Iona you are?"

"It is from the Isles of the West I come."

"From Tiree? . . . from Coll?"

"No."

"From the Long Island . . . or from Uist . . . or maybe from Benbecula?"

"No."

"Oh well, sure it is no matter to me. But may I be asking your name?"

"Macallum."

"Do you know there is a death here, Macallum?"

"If I didn't, I would know it now, because of what lies yonder."

Mechanically Andrew Blair looked round. As he knew, a rough bier was there, that was made of a dead-board laid upon three milking-stools. Beside it was a *claar*, a small tub to hold potatoes. On the bier was a corpse, covered with a canvas sheeting that looked like a sail.

"He was a worthy man, my father," began the son of the dead man, slowly ; "but he had his faults, like all of us. I might even be saying that he had his sins, to the Stones be it said. You will be knowing, Macallum, what is thought among the folk . . . that a stranger, passing by, may take away the sins of the dead, and that, too, without any hurt whatever . . . any hurt whatever."

"Ay, sure."

"And you will be knowing what is done?"

"Ay."

"With the bread . . . and the water . . . ?"

"Ay."

"It is a small thing to do. It is a Christian thing. I would be doing it myself, and that gladly, but the . . . the . . . passer-by who . . ."

"It is talking of the Sin-Eater you are?"

"Yes, yes, for sure. The Sin-Eater as he is

called—and a good Christian act it is, for all that the ministers and the priests make a frowning at it—the Sin-Eater must be a stranger. He must be a stranger, and should know nothing of the dead man—above all, bear him no grudge.”

At that Neil Ross’s eyes lightened for a moment,

“And why that?”

“Who knows? I have heard this, and I have heard that. If the Sin-Eater was hating the dead man he could take the sins and fling them into the sea, and they would be changed into demons of the air that would harry the flying soul till Judgment-Day.”

“And how would that thing be done?”

The man spoke with flashing eyes and parted lips, the breath coming swift. Andrew Blair looked at him suspiciously; and hesitated, before, in a cold voice, he spoke again.

“That is all folly, I am thinking, Macallum. Maybe it is all folly, the whole of it. But, see here, I have no time to be talking with you. If you will take the bread and the water you shall have a good meal if you want it, and . . . and . . . yes, look you, my man, I will be giving you a shilling too, for luck.”

"I will have no meal in this house, Anndramhic-Adam; nor will I do this thing unless you will be giving me two silver half-crowns. That is the sum I must have, or no other."

"Two half-crowns! Why, man, for one half-crown . . ."

"Then be eating the sins o' your father yourself, Andrew Blair! It is going I am."

"Stop, man! Stop, Macallum. See here: I will be giving you what you ask."

"So be it. Is the . . . Are you ready?"

"Ay, come this way."

With that the two men turned and moved slowly towards the bier.

In the doorway of the house stood a man and two women; farther in, a woman; and at the window to the left, the serving-wench, Jessie McFall, and two men of the farm. Of those in the doorway, the man was Peter, the half-witted youngest brother of Andrew Blair; the taller and older woman was Catreen, the widow of Adam, the second brother; and the thin, slight woman, with staring eyes and drooping mouth, was Muireall, the wife of Andrew. The old woman behind these was Maisie Macdonald.

Andrew Blair stooped and took a saucer out of the *claar*. This he put upon the covered breast of the corpse. He stooped again, and brought forth a thick square piece of new-made bread. That also he placed upon the breast of the corpse. Then he stooped again, and with that he emptied a spoonful of salt alongside the bread.

"I must see the corpse," said Neil Ross simply.

"It is not needful, Macallum."

"I must be seeing the corpse, I tell you—and for that, too, the bread and the water should be on the naked breast."

"No, no, man; it . . . "

But here a voice, that of Maisie the wise woman, came upon them, saying that the man was right, and that the eating of the sins should be done in that way and no other.

With an ill grace the son of the dead man drew back the sheeting. Beneath it, the corpse was in a clean white shirt, a death-gown long ago prepared, that covered him from his neck to his feet, and left only the dusky yellowish face exposed.

While Andrew Blair unfastened the shirt

and placed the saucer and the bread and the salt on the breast, the man beside him stood staring fixedly on the frozen features of the corpse. The new laird had to speak to him twice before he heard.

"I am ready. And you, now? What is it you are muttering over against the lips of the dead?"

"It is giving him a message I am. There is no harm in that, sure?"

"Keep to your own folk, Macallum. You are from the West you say, and we are from the North. There can be no messages between you and a Blair of Strathmore, no messages for *you* to be giving."

"He that lies here knows well the man to whom I am sending a message"—and at this response Andrew Blair scowled darkly. He would fain have sent the man about his business, but he feared he might get no other.

"It is thinking I am that you are not a Macallum at all. I know all of that name in Mull, Iona, Skye, and the near isles. What will the name of your naming be, and of your father, and of his place?"

Whether he really wanted an answer, or

whether he sought only to divert the man from his procrastination, his question had a satisfactory result.

"Well, now, it's ready I am, Anndra-mhic-Adam."

With that, Andrew Blair stooped once more and from the *claar* brought a small jug of water. From this he filled the saucer.

"You know what to say and what to do, Macallum."

There was not one there who did not have a shortened breath because of the mystery that was now before them, and the fearfulness of it. Neil Ross drew himself up, erect, stiff, with white, drawn face. All who waited, save Andrew Blair, thought that the moving of his lips was because of the prayer that was slipping upon them, like the last lapsing of the ebb-tide. But Blair was watching him closely, and knew that it was no prayer which stole out against the blank air that was around the dead.

Slowly Neil Ross extended his right arm. He took a pinch of the salt and put it in the saucer, then took another pinch and sprinkled it upon the bread. His hand shook for a

moment as he touched the saucer. But there was no shaking as he raised it towards his lips, or when he held it before him when he spoke.

"With this water that has salt in it, and has lain on thy corpse, O Adam mhic Anndra mhic Adam Mòr, I drink away all the evil that is upon thee . . . "

There was throbbing silence while he paused.

". . . And may it be upon me and not upon thee, if with this water it cannot flow away."

Thereupon, he raised the saucer and passed it thrice round the head of the corpse sun-ways ; and, having done this, lifted it to his lips and drank as much as his mouth would hold. Thereafter he poured the remnant over his left hand, and let it trickle to the ground. Then he took the piece of bread. Thrice, too, he passed it round the head of the corpse sun-ways.

He turned and looked at the man by his side, then at the others, who watched him with beating hearts.

With a loud clear voice he took the sins.

"Thoir dhomh do ciontachd, O Adam mhic

Anndra mhic Adam Mòr ! Give me thy sins to take away from thee! Lo, now, as I stand here, I break this bread that has lain on thee in corpse, and I am eating it, I am, and in that eating I take upon me the sins of thee, O man that was alive and is now white with the stillness!"

Thereupon Neil Ross broke the bread and ate of it, and took upon himself the sins of Adam Blair that was dead. It was a bitter swallowing, that. The remainder of the bread he crumbled in his hand, and threw it on the ground, and trod upon it. Andrew Blair gave a sigh of relief. His cold eyes lightened with malice.

"Be off with you, now, Macallum. We are wanting no tramps at the farm here, and perhaps you had better not be trying to get work this side Iona; for it is known as the Sin-Eater you will be, and that won't be for the helping, I am thinking! There: there are the two half-crowns for you . . . and may they bring you no harm, you that are *Scapegoat* now!"

The Sin-Eater turned at that, and stared like a hill-bull. *Scapegoat!* Ay, that's what

he was. Sin-Eater, Scapegoat! Was he not, too, another Judas, to have sold for silver that which was not for the selling? No, no, for sure Maisie Macdonald could tell him the rune that would serve for the easing of this burden. He would soon be quit of it.

Slowly he took the money, turned it over, and put it in his pocket.

"I am going, Andrew Blair," he said quietly, "I am going now. I will not say to him that is there in the silence, *A chuid do Pharas da!*—nor will I say to you, *Gu'n gleidheadh Dia thu*,—nor will I say to this dwelling that is the home of thee and thine, *Gu'n beannaicheadh Dia an tigh!*"*

Here there was a pause. All listened. Andrew Blair shifted uneasily, the furtive eyes of him going this way and that, like a ferret in the grass.

"But, Andrew Blair, I will say this: when you fare abroad, *Droch caoidh ort!* and when you go upon the water, *Gaoth gun direadh ort!* Ay, ay, Anndra-mhic-Adam, *Dia ad*

* (1) *A chuid do Pharas da!* "His share of heaven be his." (2) *Gu'n gleidheadh Dia thu*, "May God preserve you." (3) *Gu'n beannaicheadh Dia an tigh!* "God's blessing on this house."

*aghaidh 's ad aodann . . . agus bas dunach ort! Dhonas 's dholas ort, agus leat-sa!"**

The bitterness of these words was like snow in June upon all there. They stood amazed. None spoke. No one moved.

Neil Ross turned upon his heel, and, with a bright light in his eyes, walked away from the dead and the living. He went by the byres, whence he had come. Andrew Blair remained where he was, now glooming at the corpse, now biting his nails and staring at the damp sods at his feet.

When Neil reached the end of the milk-shed he saw Maisie Macdonald there, waiting.

"These were ill sayings of yours, Neil Ross," she said in a low voice, so that she might not be overheard from the house.

"So, it is knowing me you are."

"Sheen Macarthur told me."

"I have good cause."

"That is a true word. I know it."

* (1) *Droch caoidh ort!* "May a fatal accident happen to you" (*lit.* "bad moan on you"). (2) *Gaoth gun direadh ort!* "May you drift to your drowning" (*lit.* "wind without direction on you"). (3) *Dia ad aghaidh*, etc., "God against thee and in thy face . . . and may a death of woe be yours. . . . Evil and sorrow to thee and thine!"

"Tell me this thing. What is the rune that is said for the throwing into the sea of the sins of the dead? See here, Maisie Macdonald. There is no money of that man that I would carry a mile with me. Here it is. It is yours, if you will tell me that rune."

Maisie took the money hesitatingly. Then, stooping, she said slowly the few lines of the old, old rune.

"Will you be remembering that?"

"It is not forgetting it I will be, Maisie."

"Wait a moment. There is some warm milk here."

With that she went, and then, from within, beckoned to him to enter.

"There is no one here, Neil Ross. Drink the milk."

He drank; and while he did so she drew a leather pouch from some hidden place in her dress.

"And now I have this to give you."

She counted out ten pennies and two farthings.

"It is all the coppers I have. You are welcome to them. Take them, friend of my friend. They will give you the food you need, and the ferry across the Sound."

"I will do that, Maisie Macdonald, and thanks to you. It is not forgetting it I will be, nor you, good woman. And now, tell me, is it safe that I am? He called me a 'scapegoat'; he, Andrew Blair! Can evil touch me between this and the sea?"

"You must go to the place where the evil was done to you and yours—and that, I know, is on the west side of Iona. Go, and God preserve you. But here, too, is a sian that will be for the safety."

Thereupon, with swift mutterings she said this charm: an old, familiar Sian against Sudden Harm:—

"Sian a chuir Moire air Mac ort,
 Sian ro' marbhadh, sian ro' lot ort,
 Sian eadar a' chlioch 's a' ghlun,
 Sian nan Tri ann an aon ort,
 O mhullach do chinn gu bonn do chois ort;
 Sian seachd eadar a h-aon ort,
 Sian seachd eadar a dha ort,
 Sian seachd eadar a tri ort,
 Sian seachd eadar a ceithir ort,
 Sian seachd eadar a coig ort
 Sian seachd eadar a sia ort,
 Sian seachd paidir nan seach paidir dol deiseil ri diugh
 narach ort, ga do ghleidheadh bho bheud 's bho
 mhi-thapadh!"

Scarcely had she finished before she heard heavy steps approaching.

"Away with you," she whispered, repeating in a loud, angry tone, "Away with you! *Seachad! Seachad!*"

And with that Neil Ross slipped from the milk-shed and crossed the yard, and was behind the byres before Andrew Blair, with sullen mien and swift, wild eyes, strode from the house.

It was with a grim smile on his face that Neil tramped down the wet heather till he reached the high road, and fared thence as through a marsh because of the rains there had been.

For the first mile he thought of the angry mind of the dead man, bitter at paying of the silver. For the second mile he thought of the evil that had been wrought for him and his. For the third mile he pondered over all that he had heard and done and taken upon him that day.

Then he sat down upon a broken granite heap by the way, and brooded deep till one hour went, and then another, and the third was upon him.

A man driving two calves came towards

him out of the west. He did not hear or see. The man stopped: spoke again. Neil gave no answer. The drover shrugged his shoulders, hesitated, and walked slowly on, often looking back.

An hour later a shepherd came by the way he himself had tramped. He was a tall, gaunt man with a squint. The small, pale-blue eyes glittered out of a mass of red hair that almost covered his face. He stood still, opposite Neil, and leaned on his *cromak*.

"*Latha math leat,*" he said at last: "I wish you good day."

Neil glanced at him, but did not speak.

"What is your name, for I seem to know you?"

But Neil had already forgotten him. The shepherd took out his snuff-mull, helped himself, and handed the mull to the lonely way-farer. Neil mechanically helped himself.

"*Am bheil thu 'dol do Fhionphort?*" tried the shepherd again: "Are you going to Fionnaphort?"

"*Tha mise 'dol a dh' I-challum-chille,*" Neil answered, in a low, weary voice, and as a man adream: "I am on my way to Iona."

"I am thinking I know now who you are. You are the man Macallum."

Neil looked, but did not speak. His eyes dreamed against what the other could not see or know. The shepherd called angrily to his dogs to keep the sheep from straying; then, with a resentful air, turned to his victim.

"You are a silent man for sure, you are. I'm hoping it is not the curse upon you already."

"What curse?"

"Ah, *that* has brought the wind against the mist! I was thinking so!"

"What curse?"

"You are the man that was the Sin-Eater over there?"

"Ay."

"The man Macallum?"

"Ay."

"Strange it is, but three days ago I saw you in Tobermory, and heard you give your name as Neil Ross to an Iona man that was there."

"Well?"

"Oh, sure, it is nothing to me. But they

say the Sin-Eater should not be a man with a hidden lump in his pack."*

"Why?"

"For the dead know, and are content. There is no shaking off any sins, then—for that man."

"It is a lie."

"Maybe ay and maybe no."

"Well, have you more to be saying to me? I am obliged to you for your company, but it is not needing it I am, though no offence."

"Och, man, there's no offence between you and me. Sure, there's Iona in me, too; for the father of my father married a woman that was the granddaughter of Tomais Macdonald, who was a fisherman there. No, no; it is rather warning you I would be."

"And for what?"

"Well, well, just because of that laugh I heard about."

"What laugh?"

"The laugh of Adam Blair that is dead."

Neil Ross stared, his eyes large and wild. He leaned a little forward. No word came

* *i.e.* With a criminal secret, or an undiscovered crime.

from him. The look that was on his face was the question.

“Yes: it was this way. Sure, the telling of it is just as I heard it. After you ate the sins of Adam Blair, the people there brought out the coffin. When they were putting him into it, he was as stiff as a sheep dead in the snow—and just like that, too, with his eyes wide open. Well, someone saw you trampling the heather down the slope that is in front of the house, and said, ‘It is the Sin-Eater!’ With that, Andrew Blair sneered, and said—‘Ay, ’tis the scapegoat he is!’ Then, after a while, he went on: ‘The Sin-Eater they call him: ay, just so: and a bitter good bargain it is, too, if all’s true that’s thought true!’ And with that he laughed, and then his wife that was behind him laughed, and then . . .”

“Well, what then?”

“Well, ’tis Himself that hears and knows if it is true! But this is the thing I was told:—After that laughing there was a stillness and a dread. For all there saw that the corpse had turned its head and was looking after you as you went down the

heather. Then, Neil Ross, if that be your true name, Adam Blair that was dead put up his white face against the sky, and laughed."

At this, Ross sprang to his feet with a gasping sob.

"It is a lie, that thing!" he cried, shaking his fist at the shepherd. "It is a lie!"

"It is no lie. And by the same token, Andrew Blair shrank back white and shaking, and his woman had the swoon upon her, and who knows but the corpse might have come to life again had it not been for Maisie Macdonald, the deid-watcher, who clapped a handful of salt on his eyes, and tilted the coffin so that the bottom of it slid forward, and so let the whole fall flat on the ground, with Adam Blair in it sideways, and as likely as not cursing and groaning, as his wont was, for the hurt both to his old bones and his old ancient dignity."

Ross glared at the man as though the madness was upon him. Fear and horror and fierce rage swung him now this way and now that.

"What will the name of you be, shepherd?" he stuttered huskily.

"It is Eachainn Gilleasbuig I am to ourselves; and the English of that for those who have no Gaelic is Hector Gillespie; and I am Eachainn mac Ian mac Alasdair of Strathspean that is where Sutherland lies against Ross."

"Then take this thing—and that is, the curse of the Sin-Eater! And a bitter bad thing may it be upon you and yours."

And with that Neil the Sin-Eater flung his hand up into the air, and then leaped past the shepherd, and a minute later was running through the frightened sheep, with his head low, and a white foam on his lips, and his eyes red with blood as a seal's that has the death-wound on it.

On the third day of the seventh month from that day, Aulay Macneill, coming into Balliemore of Iona from the west side of the island, said to old Ronald MacCormick, that was the father of his wife, that he had seen Neil Ross again, and that he was "absent"—for though he had spoken to him, Neil would not answer, but only gloomed at him from the wet weedy rock where he sat.

The going back of the man had loosed every tongue that was in Iona. When, too, it was known that he was wrought in some terrible way, if not actually mad, the islanders whispered that it was because of the sins of Adam Blair. Seldom or never now did they speak of him by his name, but simply as "The Sin-Eater." The thing was not so rare as to cause this strangeness, nor did many (and perhaps none did) think that the sins of the dead ever might or could abide with the living who had merely done a good Christian charitable thing. But there was a reason.

Not long after Neil Ross had come again to Iona, and had settled down in the ruined roofless house on the croft of Ballyrona, just like a fox or a wild-cat, as the saying was, he was given fishing-work to do by Aulay Macneill, who lived at Ard-an-teine, at the rocky north end of the *machar* or plain that is on the west Atlantic coast of the island.

One moonlit night, either the seventh or the ninth after the earthing of Adam Blair at his own place in the Ross, Aulay Macneill saw Neil Ross steal out of the shadow of Ballyrona and make for the sea. Macneill

was there by the rocks, mending a lobster-creel. He had gone there because of the sadness. Well, when he saw the Sin-Eater, he watched.

Neil crept from rock to rock till he reached the last fang that churns the sea into yeast when the tide sucks the land just opposite.

Then he called out something that Aulay Macneill could not catch. With that he springs up, and throws his arms above him.

"Then," says Aulay when he tells the tale, "it was like a ghost he was. The moonshine was on his face like the curl o' a wave. White! there is no whiteness like that of the human face. It was whiter than the foam about the skerry it was; whiter than the moon shining; whiter than well, as white as the painted letters on the black boards of the fishing-cobles. There he stood, for all that the sea was about him, the slip-slop waves leapin' wild, and the tide making, too, at that. He was shaking like a sail two points off the wind. It was then that, all of a sudden, he called in a womany, screamin' voice—

"'I am throwing the sins of Adam Blair

into the midst of ye, white dogs o' the sea!
Drown them, tear them, drag them away out
into the black deeps! Ay, ay, ay, ye dancin'
wild waves, this is the third time I am doing
it, and now there is none left; no, not a sin,
not a sin!

“O-hi, O-ri, dark tide o' the sea,
I am giving the sins of a dead man to thee!
By the Stones, by the Wind, by the Fire, by the Tree,
From the dead man's sins set me free, set me free!
Adam mhic Anndra mhic Adam and me,
Set us free! Set us free!’

“Ay, sure, the Sin-Eater sang that over
and over; and after the third singing he
swung his arms and screamed—

“And listen to me, black waters an' running tide,
That rune is the good rune told me by Maisie the wise,
And I am Neil the son of Silis Macallum
By the black-hearted evil man Murtagh Ross,
That was the friend of Adam mac Anndra, God against him!’

And with that he scrambled and fell into
the sea. But, as I am Aulay mac Luais
and no other, he was up in a moment, an'
swimmin' like a seal, and then over the rocks
again, an' away back to that lonely roofless
place once more, laughing wild at times, an'
muttering an' whispering.”

It was this tale of Aulay Macneill's that stood between Neil Ross and the isle-folk. There was something behind all that, they whispered one to another.

So it was always the Sin-Eater he was called at last. None sought him. The few children who came upon him now and again fled at his approach, or at the very sight of him. Only Aulay Macneill saw him at times, and had word of him.

After a month had gone by, all knew that the Sin-Eater was wrought to madness because of this awful thing: the burden of Adam Blair's sins would not go from him! Night and day he could hear them laughing low, it was said.

But it was the quiet madness. He went to and fro like a shadow in the grass, and almost as soundless as that, and as voiceless. More and more the name of him grew as a terror. There were few folk on that wild west coast of Iona, and these few avoided him when the word ran that he had knowledge of strange things, and converse, too, with the secrets of the sea.

One day Aulay Macneill, in his boat, but

dumb with amaze and terror for him, saw him at high tide swimming on a long rolling wave right into the hollow of the Spouting Cave. In the memory of man, no one had done this and escaped one of three things: a snatching away into oblivion, a strangled death, or madness. The islanders know that there swims into the cave, at full tide, a Mar-Tarbh, a dreadful creature of the sea that some call a kelpie; only it is not a kelpie, which is like a woman, but rather is a sea-bull, offspring of the cattle that are never seen. Ill indeed for any sheep or goat, ay, or even dog or child, if any happens to be leaning over the edge of the Spouting Cave when the Mar-tarv roars: for, of a surety, it will fall in and straightway be devoured.

With awe and trembling Aulay listened for the screaming of the doomed man. It was full tide, and the sea-beast would be there.

The minutes passed, and no sign. Only the hollow booming of the sea, as it moved like a baffled blind giant round the cavern-bases: only the rush and spray of the water flung up the narrow shaft high into the windy air above the cliff it penetrates.

At last he saw what looked like a mass of seaweed swirled out on the surge. It was the Sin-Eater. With a leap, Aulay was at his oars. The boat swung through the sea. Just before Neil Ross was about to sink for the second time, he caught him and dragged him into the boat.

But then, as ever after, nothing was to be got out of the Sin-Eater save a single saying: *Tha e lamhan fuar: Tha e lamhan fuar!*—"It has a cold, cold hand!"

The telling of this and other tales left none free upon the island to look upon the "scape-goat" save as one accursed.

It was in the third month that a new phase of his madness came upon Neil Ross.

The horror of the sea and the passion for the sea came over him at the same happening. Oftentimes he would race along the shore, screaming wild names to it, now hot with hate and loathing, now as the pleading of a man with the woman of his love. And strange chants to it, too, were upon his lips. Old, old lines of forgotten runes were overheard by Aulay Macneill, and not Aulay only: lines wherein the ancient sea-name of the island,

Iona, that was given to it long before it was called Iona, or any other of the nine names that are said to belong to it, occurred again and again.

The flowing tide it was that wrought him thus. At the ebb he would wander across the weedy slabs or among the rocks : silent, and more like a lost duinshee than a man.

Then again after three months a change in his madness came. None knew what it was, though Aulay said that the man moaned and moaned because of the awful burden he bore. No drowning seas for the sins that could not be washed away, no grave for the live sins that would be quick till the day of the Judgment !

For weeks thereafter he disappeared. As to where he was, it is not for the knowing.

Then at last came that third day of the seventh month when, as I have said, Aulay Macneill told old Ronald MacCormick that he had seen the Sin-Eater again.

It was only a half-truth that he told, though. For, after he had seen Neil Ross upon the rock, he had followed him when he rose, and wandered back to the roofless place which he

haunted now as of yore. Less wretched a shelter now it was, because of the summer that was come, though a cold, wet summer at that.

"Is that you, Neil Ross?" he had asked, as he peered into the shadows among the ruins of the house.

"That's not my name," said the Sin-Eater; and he seemed as strange then and there, as though he were a castaway from a foreign ship.

"And what will it be, then, you that are my friend, and sure knowing me as Aulay mac Luais—Aulay Macneill that never grudges you bit or sup?"

"I am Judas."

"And at that word," says Aulay Macneill, when he tells the tale, "at that word the pulse in my heart was like a bat in a shut room. But after a bit I took up the talk.

"'Indeed,' I said; 'and I was not for knowing that. May I be so bold as to ask whose son, and of what place?'

"But all he said to me was, '*I am Judas.*'

"Well, I said, to comfort him, 'Sure, it's

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not such a bad name in itself, though I am knowing some which have a more home-like sound.' But no, it was no good.

"'I am Judas. And because I sold the Son of God for five pieces of silver . . .'

"But here I interrupted him and said,— 'Sure, now, Neil—I mean, Judas—it was eight times five.' Yet the simpleness of his sorrow prevailed, and I listened with the wet in my eyes.

"'I am Judas. And because I sold the Son of God for five silver shillings, He laid upon me all the nameless black sins of the world. And that is why I am bearing them till the Day of Days.'"

And this was the end of the Sin - Eater; for I will not tell the long story of Aulay Macneill, that gets longer and longer every winter : but only the unchanging close of it.

I will tell it in the words of Aulay.

"A bitter, wild day it was, that day I saw him to see him no more. It was late. The sea was red with the flamin' light that burned up the air betwixt Iona and all that is west

of West. I was on the shore, looking at the sea. The big green waves came in like the chariots in the Holy Book. Well, it was on the black shoulder of one of them, just short of the ton o' foam that swept above it, that I saw a spar surgin' by.

"'What is that?' I said to myself. And the reason of my wondering was this: I saw that a smaller spar was swung across it. And while I was watching that thing another great billow came in with a roar, and hurled the double spar back, and not so far from me but I might have gripped it. But who would have gripped that thing if he were for seeing what I saw?

"It is Himself knows that what I say is a true thing.

"On that spar was Neil Ross, the Sin-Eater. Naked he was as the day he was born. And he was lashed, too—ay, sure, he was lashed to it by ropes round and round his legs and his waist and his left arm. It was the Cross he was on. I saw that thing with the fear upon me. Ah, poor drifting wreck that he was! *Judas on the Cross*: It was his *eric*!

"But even as I watched, shaking in my

limbs, I saw that there was life in him still. The lips were moving, and his right arm was ever for swinging this way and that. 'Twas like an oar, working him off a lee shore: ay, that was what I thought.

"Then, all at once, he caught sight of me. Well he knew me, poor man, that has his share of heaven now, I am thinking!

"He waved, and called, but the hearing could not be, because of a big surge o' water that came tumbling down upon him. In the stroke of an oar he was swept close by the rocks where I was standing. In that flounderin', seethin' whirlpool I saw the white face of him for a moment, an' as he went out on the re-surge like a hauled net, I heard these words fallin' against my ears,—

"*'An eirig m'anama . . .* In ransom for my soul!'

"And with that I saw the double-spar turn over and slide down the back-sweep of a drowning big wave. Ay, sure, it went out to the deep sea swift enough then. It was in the big eddy that rushes between Skerry-Mòr and Skerry-Beag. I did not see it again—no, not for the quarter of an hour,

I am thinking. Then I saw just the whirling top of it rising out of the flying yeast of a great, black-blustering wave, that was rushing northward before the current that is called the Black-Eddy.

“With that you have the end of Neil Ross: ay, sure, him that was called the Sin-Eater. And that is a true thing; and may God save us the sorrow of sorrows.

“And that is all.”

THE NINTH WAVE

THE NINTH WAVE

THE wind fell as we crossed the Sound. There was only one oar in the boat, and we lay idly adrift. The tide was still on the ebb, and so we made way for Soa; though, well before the island could be reached, the tide would turn, and the sea-wind would stir, and we be up the Sound and at Balliemore again almost as quick as the laying of a net.

As we—and by “us” I am meaning Phadric Macrae and Ivor McLean, fishermen of Iona, and myself beside Ivor at the helm—as we slid slowly past the ragged islet known as Eilean-na-h’ Aon-Chaorach, torn and rent by the tides and surges of a thousand years, I saw a school of seals basking in the sun. One by one slithered into the water, and I could note the dark forms, like moving patches of sea-weed, drifting in the green underglooms.

Then, after a time, we bore down upon

Sgeir-na-Oir, a barren rock. Three great cor-morants stood watching us. Their necks shone in the sunlight like snakes mailed in blue and green. On the upper ledges were eight or ten northern-divers. They did not seem to see us, though I knew that their fierce light-blue eyes noted every motion we made. The small sea-ducks bobbed up and down, first one flirt of a little black-feathered rump, then another, then a thjrd, till a score or so were under water, and half-a-hundred more were ready at a moment's notice to follow suit. A skua hopped among the sputtering weed, and screamed disconsolately at intervals. Among the myriad colonies of close-set mussels, which gave a blue bloom like that of the sloe to the weed-covered boulders, a few kittiwakes and dotterels flitted to and fro. High overhead, white against the blue as a cloudlet, a gannet hung motionless, seemingly frozen to the sky.

Below the lapse of the boat the water was pale green. I could see the liath and saith fanning their fins in slow flight, and sometimes a little scurrying cloud of tiny flukies and inch-long codling. For two or

three fathoms beyond the boat the waters were blue. If blueness can be alive and have its own life and movement, it must be happy on these western seas, where it dreams into shadowy Lethes of amethyst and deep, dark oblivions of violet.

Suddenly a streak of silver ran for a moment along the sea to starboard. It was like an arrow of moonlight shot along the surface of the blue and gold. Almost immediately afterward, a stertorous sigh was audible. A black knife cut the flow of the water: the shoulder of a pollack.

"The mackerel are coming in from the sea," said Macrae. He leaned forward, wet the palm of his hand, and held it seaward. "Ay, the tide has turned ——"

*"Ohrone—achree—an—Srùth-màra!
Ohrone—achree—an—Lionadh!"*

he droned monotonously, over and over, with few variations.

*"An' it's Oh an' Oh for the tides o' the sea,
An' it's Oh for the flowing tide,"*

I sang at last in mockery.

"Come, Phadric," I cried, "you are as bad

as Peter McAlpin's lassie, Fiona, with the pipes!"

Both men laughed lightly. On the last Sabbath, old McAlpin had held a prayer-meeting in his little house in the "street," in Balliemore of Iona. At the end of his discourse he told his hearers that the voice of God was terrible only to the evil-doer, but beautiful to the righteous man, and that this voice was even now among them, speaking in a thousand ways, and yet in one way. And at this moment, that elfin grand-daughter of his, who was in the byre close by, let go upon the pipes with so long and weary a whine that the collies by the fire whimpered, and would have howled outright but for the Word of God that still lay open on the big stool in front of old Peter. For it was in this way that the dogs knew when the Sabbath readings were over, and there was not one that would dare to bark or howl, much less rise and go out, till the Book was closed with a loud, solemn bang. Well, again and again that weary quavering moan went up and down the room, till even old McAlpin smiled, though he was fair angry with Fiona. But

he made the sign of silence, and began: "My brethren, even in this trial it may be the Almighty has a message for us —," when at that moment Fiona was kicked by a cow, and fell against the board with the pipes, and squeezed out so wild a wail that McAlpin started up and cried, in the Lowland way that he had won out of his wife, "*Hoots, havers, an' a'! come oot o' that, ye deil's punkie!*"

So it was this memory that made Phadric and Ivor smile. Suddenly Ivor began, with a long rising and falling cadence, an old Gaelic rune of the Faring of the Tide:

*"Athair, A mhic, A Spioraid Naomh,
Biodh an Tri-aon leinn, a la's a dh' oidhche;
S' air chul nan tonn, no air thaobh nam beann!"*

"O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Be the Three-in-One with us day and night,
On the crested wave, when waves run high!"

And out of the place in the West
Where Tir-nan-Òg, the Land of Youth
Is, the Land of Youth everlasting,
Send the great tide that carries the sea-weed
And brings the birds, out of the North:
And bid it wind as a snake through the bracken,
As a great snake through the heather of the sea,
The fair blooming heather of the sunlit sea.

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And may it bring the fish to our nets,
 And the great fish to our lines :
 And may it sweep away the sea-hounds
 That devour the herring :
 And may it drown the heavy pollack
 That respect not our nets
 But fall into and tear them and ruin them wholly.

And may I, or any that is of my blood,
 Behold not the Wave-Haunter who comes in with the Tide ;
 Or the Maighdeann-màra who broods in the shallows,
 Where the sea-caves are, in the ebb :
 And fair may my fishing be, and the fishing of those near
 to me,
 And good may this Tide be, and good may it bring :
 And may there be no calling in the Flow, this Srùth-màra,
 And may there be no burden in the Ebb ! *ochone !*

*An ainm an Athar, s' an Mhic, s' an Spioraid Naomh,
 Biodh an Tri-aon leinn, a la's a dh' oidhche,
 S' air chul nan tonn, no air thaobh nam beann !
 O'hone ! arone !*

Both men sang the closing lines, with loudly swelling voices, and with a wailing fervour which no words of mine could convey.

Runes of this kind prevail all over the isles, from the Butt of Lewis to the Rhinns of Islay : identical in spirit, though varying in lines and phrases, according to the mood and temperament of the *rannaiche* or singer, the local or peculiar physiognomy of nature, the

instinctive yielding to hereditary wonder-words, and other compelling circumstances of the outer and inner life. Almost needless to say, the sea-maid or sea-witch and the Wave-Haunter occur in many of those wild runes, particularly in those that are impromptu. In the Outer Hebrides, the runes are wild natural hymns rather than Pagan chants: though marked distinctions prevail there also,—for in Harris and the Lews the folk are Protestant almost to a man, while in Benbecula and the Southern Hebrides the Catholics are in a like ascendancy. But all are at one in the common Brotherhood of Sorrow.

The only lines in Ivor McLean's wailing song which puzzled me were the two last which came before "the good words," "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit," etc.

"Tell me, in English, Ivor," I said, after a silence, wherein I pondered the Gaelic words, "what is the meaning of

" 'And may there be no calling in the Flow, this Srùth-màra,
And may there be no burden in the Ebb' ?"

"Yes, I will be telling you what is the meaning of that. When the great tide that wells out

of the hollow of the sea, and sweeps towards all the coasts of the world, first stirs, when she will be knowing that the Ebb is not any more moving at all, she sends out nine long waves. And I will be forgetting what these waves are: but one will be to shepherd the sea-weed that is for the blessing of man; and another is for to wake the fish that sleep in the deeps; and another is for this, and another will be for that; and the seventh is to rouse the Wave-Haunter and all the creatures of the water that fear and hate man; and the eighth no man knows, though the priests say it is to carry the Whisper of Mary; and the ninth——”

“And the ninth, Ivor?”

“May it be far from us, from you and from me, and from those of us. An’ I will be sayin’ nothing against it, not I; nor against anything that is in the sea. An’ you will be noting that!

“Well, this ninth wave goes through the water on the forehead of the tide. An’ wherever it will be going it *calls*. An’ the call of it is—
*‘Come away, come away, the sea waits!
 Follow! . . . Come away, come away, the sea*

*waits ! Follow !** An' whoever hears that must arise and go, whether he be fish or pollack, or seal or otter, or great skua or small tern, or bird or beast of the shore, or bird or beast of the sea, or whether it be man or woman or child, or any of the others."

"*Any of the others, Ivor?*"

"I will not be saying anything about that," replied McLean gravely; "you will be knowing well what I mean, and if you do not it is not for me to talk of that which is not to be talked about.

"Well, as I was for saying, that calling of the ninth wave of the Tide is what Ian Mòr of the hills speaks of as 'the whisper of the snow that falls on the hair, the whisper of the frost that lies on the cold face of him that will never be waking again.'"

"*Death?*"

"It is *you* that will be saying it."

"Well," he resumed, after a moment's hush, "a man may live by the sea for five-score years and never hear that ninth wave call in any *Srùth-màra*; but soon or late he will

* Ivor, of course, gave these words in the Gaelic, the sound of which has the sweet wail of the sea in it.

hear it. An' many is the Flood that will be silent for all of us; but there will be one Flood for each of us that will be a dreadful Voice, a voice of terror and of dreadfulness. And whoever hears that voice, he for sure will be the burden in the Ebb."

"Has any heard that Voice, and lived?"

McLean looked at me, but said nothing. Phadric Macrae rose, tautened a rope, and made a sign to me to put the helm a-lee. Then, looking into the green water slipping by—for the tide was feeling our keel, and a stronger breath from the sea lay against the hollow that was growing in the sail—he said to Ivor:

"You should be telling her of Ivor MacIvor Mhic Niall."

"Who was Ivor MacNeill?" I said.

"He was the father of my mother," answered McLean, "and was known throughout the north isles as Ivor Carminish: for he had a farm on the eastern lands of Carminish which lie between the hills called Strondeval and Rondeval, that are in the far south of the Northern Hebrides, and near what will be known to you as the Obb of Harris.

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"And I will now be telling you about him in the Gaelic, for it is more easy to me, and more pleasant for us all.

"When Ivor MacEachainn Carminish, that was Ivor's father, died, he left the farm to his elder son, and to his second son Sheumais. By this time Ivor was married, and had the daughter who is my mother. But he was a lonely man, and an islesman to the heart's core. So . . . but you will be knowing the isles that lie off the Obb of Harris: the Saghay, and Ensay, and Killegray, and, farther west, Berneray; and north-west, Pabaidh; and, beyond that again, Shillaidh?"

For the moment I was confused, for these names are so common: and I was thinking of the big isle of Berneray that lies in huge Loch Roag that has swallowed so great a mouthful of Western Lewis, to the seaward of which also are the two Pabbays, Pabaidh Mòr and Pabaidh Beag. But when McLean added, "and other isles of the Caolas Harrish (the Sound of Harris)," I remembered aright; and indeed I knew both, though the nor' isles better, for I had lived near Callernish on the inner waters of Roag.

“Well, Carminish had sheep-runs upon some of these. One summer the gloom came upon him, and he left Sheumais to take care of the farm, and of Morag his wife, and of Sheen their daughter; and he went to live upon Pabbay, near the old castle that is by the Rua Dune on the south-east of the isle. There he stayed for three months. But on the last night of each month he heard the sea calling in his sleep; and what he heard was like ‘*Come away, come away, the sea waits! Follow! . . . Come away, come away, the sea waits! Follow!*’ And he knew the voice of the ninth wave; and that it would not be there in the darkness of sleep if it were not already moving towards him through the dark ways of *An Dàn* (Destiny). So, thinking to pass away from a place doomed for him, and that he might be safe elsewhere, he sailed north to a kinsman’s croft on Aird-Vanish in the island of Taransay. But at the end of that month he heard in his sleep the noise of tidal waters, and at the gathering of the ebb he heard ‘*Come away, come away, the sea waits! Follow!*’ Then once more, when the November heat-spell had come

he sailed farther northward still. He stopped awhile at Eilean Mhealastaidh, which is under the morning shadow of high Griomabhal on the mainland, and at other places; till he settled, in the third week, at his cousin Eachainn MacEachainn's bothy, near Callernish, where the Great Stones of old stand by the sea, and hear nothing for ever but the noise of the waves of the North Sea and the cry of the sea-wind.

"And when the last night of November had come and gone, and he had heard in his sleep no calling of the ninth wave of the Flowing Tide, he took heart of grace. All through that next day he went in peace. Eachainn wondered often with slant eyes when he saw the morose man smile, and heard his silence give way now and again to a short, mirthless laugh.

"The two were at the porridge, and Eachainn was muttering his *Bui'cheas dha'n Ti*, the Thanks to the Being, when Carminish suddenly leaped to his feet, and, with white face, stood shaking like a rope in the wind.

"'In the name of the Son, what is it, Ivor Mhic Ivor? What is it, Carminish?' cried Eachainn.

"But the stricken man could scarce speak. At last, with a long sigh, he turned and looked at his kinsman, and that look went down into the shivering heart like the polar wind into a crofter's hut.

"*'What will be that?'* said Carminish, in a hoarse whisper.

"Eachainn listened, but he could hear no wailing *beann-sith*, no unwonted sound.

"*'Sure, I hear nothing but the wind moaning through the Great Stones, an' beyond them the noise of the Flowin' Tide.'*

"*'The Flowing Tide! the Flowing Tide!'* cried Carminish, and no longer with the hush in the voice. *'An' what is it you hear in the Flowing Tide?'*

"Eachainn looked in silence. What was the thing he could say? For now he knew.

"*'Ah, och, och, ochone, you may well sigh, Eachainn Mhic Eachainn! For the ninth wave o' the Flowing Tide is coming out o' the North Sea upon this shore, an' already I can hear it calling 'Come away, come away, the sea waits! Follow! . . . Come away, come away, the sea waits! Follow!'*

"And with that Carminish dashed out the

light that was upon the table, and leaped upon Eachainn, and dinged him to the floor, and would have killed him, but for the growing noise of the sea beyond the Stannin' Stones o' Callernish, and the woe-weary sough o' the wind, an' the calling, calling, '*Come, come away! Come, come away!*'

"And so he rose and staggered to the door, and flung himself out into the night: while Eachainn lay upon the floor and gasped for breath, and then crawled to his knees, an' took the Book from the shelf by his fern-straw mattress, an' put his cheek against it, an' moaned to God, an' cried like a child for the doom that was upon Ivor McIvor Mhic Niall, who was of his own blood, and his own *dall* at that.

"And while he moaned, Carminish was stalking through the great, gaunt, looming Stones of the Druids that were here before St Colum and his *Shona* came, and laughing wild. And all the time the tide was coming in, and the tide and the deep sea and the waves of the shore, and the wind in the salt grass and the weary reeds and the black-pool gale, made a noise of a dreadful hymn, that was

the death-hymn, the going-rune of Ivor the son of Ivor of the kindred of Niall.

"And it was there that they found his body in the grey dawn, wet and stiff with the salt ooze. For the soul that was in him had heard the call of the ninth wave that was for him. So, and may the Being keep back that hour for us, there was a burden upon that ebb on the morning of that day.

"Also, there is this thing for the hearing. In the dim dark before the curlew cried at dawn, Eachainn heard a voice about the house, a voice going like a thing blind and baffled,

"*' Cha till, cha till, cha till mi tuille! '*"
(I return, I return, I return never more!)

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THE wind that blows on the feet of the dead came calling loud across the Ross as we put about the boat off the Rudhe Callachain. The ebb sucked at the keel, while, like a cork, we were swung lightly by the swell. For we were in the strait between Eilean Dubh and the Isle of the Swine; and that is where the current has a bad pull—the current that is made of the inflow and the outflow. I have heard that a weary woman of the olden days broods down there in a cave, and that day and night she weaves a web of water, which a fierce spirit in the sea tears this way and that as soon as woven.

So we put about, and went before the east wind: and below the dip of the sail a-lee I watched Soa grow bigger and gaunter and blacker against the white wave. As we came so near that it was as though the wash of the sea among the hollows bubbled in our ears, I

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saw a large bull-seal lying half-in half-out of the water, and staring at us with an angry, fearless look.

Phadric and Ivor caught sight of it almost at the same moment.

To my surprise Macrae suddenly rose and put a rosad upon it. I could hear the wind through his clothes as he stood by the mast.

The rosad or spell was, of course, in the Gaelic; but its meaning was something like this—

*Ho, ro, O Ron dubh, O Ron dubh !
An ainm an Athar, O Ron !
'S an mhic, O Ron !
'S an Spioraid Nàimh.
O Ron-à-mhàra, O Ron dubh !*

Ho, ro, O black Seal, O black Seal !
In the name of the Father,
And of the Son,
And of the Holy Ghost,
O Seal of the deep sea, O black Seal !

Hearken the thing that I say to thee,
I, Phadric MacAlastair MhicCrae,
Who dwell in a house on the Island
That you look on night and day from Soa !
For I put *rosad* upon thee,
And upon the woman-seal that won thee,
And the women-seal that are thine,

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And the young that thou hast ;
Ay, upon thee and all thy kin
I put *ruad*, O *Ron dubh*, O *Ron-à-mhàra* !

And may no harm come to me or mine,
Or to any fishing or snaring that is of me ;
Or to any sailing by storm or dusk,
Or when the moonshine fills the blind eyes of the dead,
No harm to me or mine
From thee or thine !

With a slow swinging motion of his head
Phadric broke out again into the first words
of the incantation, and now Ivor joined him ;
and with the call of the wind and the leaping
and the splashing of the waves was blent the
chant of the two fishermen—

Ho, ro, O Ron dubh, O Ron dubh !
An ainm an Athar, 's an Mhic, 's an Spioriad Naomh,
O Ron-à-mhàra, O Ron dubh !

Then the men sat back, with that dazed
look in the eyes I have so often seen in those
of men or women of the Isles who are wrought.
No word was spoken till we came almost
straight upon Eilean-na-h' Aon-Chaorach. Then
at the rocks we tacked, and went splashing up
the Sound like a pollack on a Sabbath noon.*

* The Iona fishermen, and, indeed, the Gaelic and Scottish fishermen generally, believe that the pollack (porpoise) knows

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"What was wrong with the old man of the sea?" I asked Macrae.

At first he would say nothing. He looked vaguely at a coiled rope; then, with hand-shaded gaze, across to the red rocks at Fionnaphort. I repeated my question. He took refuge in English.

"It wass ferry likely the *Clansman* would be pringing ta new minister-body. Did you pe knowing him, or his people, or where he came from?"

But I was not to be put off thus; and at last, while Ivor stared down the green-shelving lawns of the sea below us, Phadric told me this thing. His reluctance was partly due to the shyness which, with the Gael, almost invariably follows strong emotion, and partly to that strange, obscure, secretive instinct which is also so characteristically Celtic, and often prevents Gaels of far apart isles, or of different clans, from communicating to each other stories or legends of a peculiarly intimate kind.

when it is the Sabbath, and on that day will come closer to the land, and be more wanton in its gambols on the sun-warmed surface of the sea, than on the days when the herring-boats are abroad.

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"I will tell you what my father told me, and what, if you like, you may hear again from the sister of my father, who is the wife of Ian Finlay, who has the farm on the north side of Dùn-I.

"You will have heard of old James Achanna of Eilanmore, off the Ord o' Sutherland? To be sure, for have you not stayed there. Well, I need not tell you how he came there out of the south, but it will be news to you to learn that my elder brother Murdoch was had by him as a shepherd, and to help on the farm. And the way of that thing was this. Murdoch had gone to the fishing north of Skye, with Angus and William Macdonald, and in the great gale that broke up their boat, among so many others, he found himself stranded on Eilanmore. Achanna told him that, as he was ruined, and so far from home, he would give him employment; and though Murdoch had never thought to serve under a Galloway man, he agreed.

"For a year he worked on the upper farm, Ardoch-beag as it was called. There the gloom came upon him. Turn which way he would, the beauty that is in the day was no

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more. In vain, when he came out into the air in the morning did he cry *Deasiul!* and keep by the sun-way. At night he heard the sea calling in his sleep. So, when the lambing was over, he told Achanna that he must go, for he hungered for the sea. True, the wave ran all around Eilanmore, but the farm was between bare hills and among high moors, and the house was in a hollow place. But it was needful for him to go. Even then, though he did not know it, the madness of the sea was upon him.

"But the Galloway man did not wish to lose my brother, who was a quiet man, and worked for a small wage. Murdoch was a silent lad, but he had often the light in his eyes, and none knew of what he was thinking: maybe it was of a lass, or a friend, or of the ingle-neuk where his old mother sang o' nights, or of the sight and sound of Iona that was his own land; but I'm considerin' it was the sea he was dreamin' of, how the waves ran laughin' an' dancin' against the tide, like lambkins comin' to meet the shepherd, or how the big green billows went sweepin' white an' ghostly through the moonless nights.

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"So the troth that was come to between them was this: that Murdoch should abide for a year longer, that is till Lammastide; then that he should no longer live at Ardoch-beag, but, instead, should go and keep the sheep on Bac-Mòr."

"On Bac - Mòr, Phadric," I interrupted, "for sure, you do not mean *our* Bac-Mòr?"

"For sure, I mean no other: Bac-Mòr, of the Treshnish Isles, that is eleven miles north of Iona, and a long four north-west of Staffa: an' just Bac-Mòr, an' no other."

"Murdoch would be near home, there."

"Ay, near, an' farther away: for 'tis to be farther off to be near that which your heart loves but ye can't get."

"Well, Murdoch agreed to this, but he did not know there was no boat on the island. It was all very well in the summer. The herrin' smacks lay off Bac-Mòr or Bac-beag many a time; and he could see them mornin', noon, an' night; an' nigh every day he could watch the big steamer comin' southward down the Mornish and Treshnish coasts of Mull, and

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stand by for an hour off Staffa, or else come northward out of the Sound of Iona round the Eilean Rabach; and once or twice a week he saw the *Clansman* coming or going from Bunessan in the Ross to Scarnish in the Isle of Tiree. Maybe, too, now and again, a foreign sloop or a coasting schooner would sail by; and twice, at least, a yacht lay off the wild shore, and put a boat in at the landing-place, and let some laughing folk loose upon that quiet place. The first time it was a steam yacht, owned by a rich foreigner, either an Englishman or an American,—I misremember now,—an' he spoke to Murdoch as though he were a savage, and he and his gay folk laughed when my brother spoke in the only English he had (an' sober, good English it was), an' then he shoves some money into his hand, as though both were evil-doers and were ashamed to be seen doing what they did.

“‘An' what is this for?’ said my brother.

“‘Oh, it's for yourself, my man, to drink our health with,’ answered the English lord, or whatever he was, rudely. Then Murdoch looked at him and his quietly, an' he said,

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'God has your health an' my health in the hollow of His hands. But I wish you well. Only, I am not being your man, any more than I am for calling *you, my* man; an' I will ask you to take back this money to drink with; nor have I any need for money, but only for that which is free to all, but that only God can give.' And with that the foreign people went away, and laughed less. But when the second yacht came, though it was a yawl and owned by a Glasgow man who had folk in the west, Murdoch would not come down to the shore, but lay under the shadow of a rock amid his sheep, and kept his eyes upon the sun that was moving west out of the south.

"Well, all through the fine months Murdoch stayed on Bac-Mòr, and thereafter through the early winter. The last time I saw him was at the New Year. On Hogmanay night my father was drinking hard, and nothing would serve him but he must borrow Alec Macarthur's boat, and that he and our mother and myself, and Ian Finlay and his wife, my sister, should go out before the quiet south wind that was blowing, and see Murdoch

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where he lay sleeping or sat dreaming in his lonely bothy. And, truth, we went. It was a white sailing that I remember. The moon-shinings ran in and out of the wavelets like herrings through salmon nets. The fire-flaughts, too, went speeding about. I was but a laddie then, an' I noted it all; an' the sheet-lightning that played behind the cloudy lift in the nor'-west.

"But when we got to Bac-Mòr there was no sign of Murdoch at the bothy: no, not though we called high and low. Then my father and Ian Finlay went to look, and we stayed by the peats. When they came back, an hour later, I saw that my father was no more in drink. He had the same look in his eyes as Ronald McLean had that day last winter when they told him his bit girlie had been caught by the small-pox in Glasgow.

"I could not hear, or I could not make out, what was said; but I know that we all got into the boat again, all except my father. And he stayed. And next day Ian Finlay and Alec Macarthur went out to Bac-Mòr, and brought him back.

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"And from him and from Ian I knew all there was to be known. It was a hard New Year for all, and since that day, till a night of which I will tell you, my father brooded and drank, drank and brooded, and my mother wept through the winter gloamings and spent the nights starin' into the peats, wi' her knittin' lyin' on her lap.

"For when they had gone to seek Murdoch that Hogmanay night, they came upon him away from his sheep. But this was what they saw. There was a black rock that stood out in the moonshine, with the water all about it; and on this rock Murdoch lay naked, and laughing wild. An' every now and then he would lean forward and stretch his arms out, an' call to his dearie. An' at last, just as the watchers, shiverin' wi' fear an' awe, were going to close in upon him, they saw a—a—thing—come out o' the water. It was long an' dark, an' Ian said its eyes were like clots o' blood; but as to that no man can say yea or nay, for Ian himself admits it was a seal.

"An' this thing is true, *an ainm an Athar!* they saw the dark beast o' the sea creep on

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to the rock beside Murdoch, an' lie down beside him, and let him clasp an' kiss it. An' then he stood up, and laughed till the skin crept on those who heard, and cried out on his dearie and on a' the dumb things o' the sea, an' the Wave-Haunter an' the Grey Shadow; an' he raised his hands, an' cursed the world o' men, and cried out to God, *'Turn your face to your own airidh, O God, an' may rain an' storm an' snow be between us!'*

"An' wi' that, Deirg, his collie, could bide no more, but loupit across the water, and was on the rock beside him, wi' his fell bristling like a hedge-rat. For both the naked man an' the wet, gleamin' beast, a great she-seal out o' the north, turned upon Deirg, an' he fought for his life. But what could the puir thing do? The seal buried her fangs in his shoulder at last, an' pinned him to the ground. Then Murdoch stooped, an' dragged her off, an' bent down an' tore at the throat o' Deirg wi' his own teeth. Ay, God's truth it is! An' when the collie was stark, he took him up by the hind legs an' the tail, an' swung him round an' round his head, an'

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whirled him into the sea, where he fell black in a white splash o' the moon.

"An' wi' that, Murdoch slipped, and reeled backward into the sea, his hands gripping at the whirling stars. An' the thing beside him louped after him, an' my father an' Ian heard a cry an' a cryin' that made their hearts sob. But when they got down to the rock they saw nothing, except the floating body o' Deirg.

"Sure it was a weary night for the old man, there on Bac-Mòr by himself, with that awful thing that had happened. He stayed there to see and hear what might be seen and heard. But nothing he heard—nothing saw. It was afterwards that he heard how Donncha MacDonald was on Bac-Mòr three days before this, and how Murdoch had told him he was in love wi' a *maighdeann-mhara*, a sea-maid.

"But this thing has to be known. It was a month later, on the night o' the full moon, that Ian Finlay and Ian Macarthur and Sheumais Macallum were upset in the calm water inside the Sound, just off Port-na-Frang, and were nigh drowned, but that they called upon God and the Son, and so escaped,

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and heard no more the laughter of Murdoch from the sea.

"And at midnight my father heard the voice of his eldest son at the door; but he would not let him in. And in the morning he found his boat broken and shred in splinters, and his one net all torn. An' that day was the Sabbath; so, being a holy day, he took the Scripture with him, an' he and Neil Morrison the minister, having had the Bread an' Wine, went along the Sound in a boat, following a shadow in the water, till they came to Soa. An' there Neil Morrison read the Word o' God to the seals that lay baskin' in the sun; and one, a female, snarled and showed her fangs; and another, a black one, lifted its head and made a noise that was not like the barking of any seal, but was as the laughter of Murdoch when he swung the dead body of Deirg.

"And that is all that is to be said. And silence is best now between you and any other. And no man knows the judgments o' God.

"And that is all."

GREEN BRANCHES

NOTE

THIS story is one of the Achanna series, of which "The Anointed Man" is in *Spiritual Tales*, and "The Dan-nan-Ron" is in the present volume—to which, indeed, "Green Branches" is properly a sequel. (See the note to "The Dan-nan-Ron" about the name 'Gloom.' I may add here that the surname Achanna is that familiar in the South as Hannay.)

GREEN BRANCHES

IN the year that followed the death of Mànus MacCodrum, James Achanna saw nothing of his brother Gloom. He might have thought himself alone in the world, of all his people, but for a letter that came to him out of the west. True, he had never accepted the common opinion that his brothers had both been drowned on that night when Anne Gillespie left Eilanmore with Mànus. In the first place, he had nothing of that inner conviction concerning the fate of Gloom which he had concerning that of Marcus; in the next, had he not heard the sound of the *feadan*, which no one that he knew played, except Gloom; and, for further token, was not the tune that which he hated above all others—the Dance of the Dead—for who but Gloom would be playing that, he hating it so, and the hour being late, and no one else on Eilanmore? It was no sure thing that the dead had not come back;

but the more he thought of it the more Achanna believed that his sixth brother was still alive. Of this, however, he said nothing to anyone.

It was as a man set free that, at last, after long waiting and patient trouble with the disposal of all that was left of the Achanna heritage, he left the island. It was a grey memory for him. The bleak moorland of it, the blight that had lain so long and so often upon the crops, the rains that had swept the isle for grey days and grey weeks and grey months, the sobbing of the sea by day and its dark moan by night, its dim relinquishing sigh in the calm of dreary ebbs, its hollow baffling roar when the storm-shadow swept up out of the sea, one and all oppressed him, even in memory. He had never loved the island, even when it lay green and fragrant in the green and white seas under white and blue skies, fresh and sweet as an Eden of the sea. He had ever been lonely and weary, tired of the mysterious shadow that lay upon his folk, caring little for any of his brothers except the eldest—long since mysteriously gone out of the ken of man—and almost hating

Gloom, who had ever borne him a grudge because of his beauty, and because of his likeness to and reverent heed for Alison. Moreover, ever since he had come to love Katreen Macarthur, the daughter of Donald Macarthur who lived in Sleat of Skye, he had been eager to live near her; the more eager as he knew that Gloom loved the girl also, and wished for success not only for his own sake, but so as to put a slight upon his younger brother.

So, when at last he left the island, he sailed southward gladly. He was leaving Eilanmore; he was bound to a new home in Skye, and perhaps he was going to his long-delayed, long dreamed-of happiness. True, Katreen was not pledged to him; he did not even know for sure if she loved him. He thought, hoped, dreamed, almost believed that she did; but then there was her cousin Ian, who had long wooed her, and to whom old Donald Macarthur had given his blessing. Nevertheless, his heart would have been lighter than it had been for long, but for two things. First, there was the letter. Some weeks earlier he had received it, not recognising the writing, because of the few letters he had ever seen, and, more-

over, as it was in a feigned hand. With difficulty he had deciphered the manuscript, plain printed though it was. It ran thus:—

“Well, Sheumais, my brother, it is wondering if I am dead, you will be. Maybe ay and maybe no. But I send you this writing to let you see that I know all you do and think of. So you are going to leave Eilanmore without an Achanna upon it? And you will be going to Sleat in Skye? Well, let me be telling you this thing. *Do not go*. I see blood there. And there is this, too: neither you nor any man shall take Katreen away from me. *You* know that; and Ian Macarthur knows it; and Katreen knows it: and that holds whether I am alive or dead. I say to you: do not go. It will be better for you and for all. Ian Macarthur is away in the north-sea with the whaler-captain who came to us at Eilanmore, and will not be back for three months yet. It will be better for him not to come back. But if he comes back he will have to reckon with the man who says that Katreen Macarthur is his. I would rather not have two men to speak to, and one my brother. It does not matter to you where I am. I

want no money just now. But put aside my portion for me. Have it ready for me against the day I call for it. I will not be patient that day: so have it ready for me. In the place that I am I am content. You will be saying: why is my brother away in a remote place (I will say this to you: that it is not farther north than St Kilda nor farther south than the Mull of Cantyre!), and for what reason? That is between me and silence. But perhaps you think of Anne sometimes. Do you know that she lies under the green grass? And of Mànus MacCodrum? They say that he swam out into the sea and was drowned; and they whisper of the seal-blood, though the minister is wroth with them for that. He calls it a madness. Well, I was there at that madness, and I played to it on my *feadan*. And now, Sheumais, can you be thinking of what the tune was that I played?

“Your brother, who waits his own day,

“GLOOM.”

“Do not be forgetting this thing: *I would rather not be playing the ‘Damhsà-na-mairbh.’* It was an ill hour for Mànus when he heard

the Dàn-nan-Ròn; it was the song of his soul, that; and yours is the Davsa-na-Mairv."

This letter was ever in his mind: this, and what happened in the gloaming when he sailed away for Skye in the herring-smack of two men who lived at Armadale in Sleat. For, as the boat moved slowly out of the haven, one of the men asked him if he was sure that no one was left upon the island; for he thought he had seen a figure on the rocks, waving a black scarf. Achanna shook his head, but just then his companion cried that at that moment he had seen the same thing. So the smack was put about, and when she was moving slow through the haven again, Achanna sculled ashore in the little coggly punt. In vain he searched here and there, calling loudly again and again. Both men could hardly have been mistaken, he thought. If there were no human creature on the island, and if their eyes had not played them false, who could it be? The wraith of Marcus, mayhap; or might it be the old man himself (his father), risen to bid farewell to his youngest son, or to warn him?

It was no use to wait longer; so, looking often behind him, he made his way to the boat again, and rowed slowly out towards the smack.

Jerk—jerk—jerk across the water came, low but only too loud for him, the opening bars of the *Damhsa-na-Mairbh*. A horror came upon him, and he drove the boat through the water so that the sea splashed over the bows. When he came on deck he cried in a hoarse voice to the man next him to put up the helm, and let the smack swing to the wind.

"There is no one there, Callum Campbell," he whispered.

"And who is it that will be making that strange music?"

"What music?"

"Sure, it has stopped now, but I heard it clear, and so did Anndra MacEwan. It was like the sound of a reed-pipe, and the tune was an eerie one at that."

"It was the Dance of the Dead."

"And who will be playing that?" asked the man, with fear in his eyes.

"No living man."

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"No living man?"

"No. I'm thinking it will be one of my brothers who was drowned here, and by the same token that it is Gloom, for he played upon the *feadan*; but if not, then . . . then . . . "

The two men waited in breathless silence, each trembling with superstitious fear; but at last the elder made a sign to Achanna to finish.

"Then . . . it will be the Kelpie."

"Is there . . . is there one of the . . . the cave-women here?"

"It is said; and you know of old that the Kelpie sings or plays a strange tune to wile seamen to their death."

At that moment, the fantastic jerking music came loud and clear across the bay. There was a horrible suggestion in it, as if dead bodies were moving along the ground with long jerks, and crying and laughing wild. It was enough; the men, Campbell and MacEwan, would not now have waited longer if Achanna had offered them all he had in the world. Nor were they, or he, out of their panic haste till the smack stood well out at sea, and not a sound could be heard from Eilanmore.

They stood watching, silent. Out of the dusky mass that lay in the seaward way to the north came a red gleam. It was like an eye staring after them with blood-red glances.

"What is that, Achanna?" asked one of the men at last.

"It looks as though a fire had been lit in the house up in the island. The door and the window must be open. The fire must be fed with wood, for no peats would give that flame; and there were none lit when I left. To my knowing, there was no wood for burning except the wood of the shelves and the bed."

"And who would be doing that?"

"I know of that no more than you do, Callum Campbell."

No more was said, and it was a relief to all when the last glimmer of the light was absorbed in the darkness.

At the end of the voyage Campbell and MacEwan were well pleased to be quit of their companion; not so much because he was moody and distraught, as because they feared that a spell was upon him—a fate in the working of which they might become

involved. It needed no vow of the one to the other for them to come to the conclusion that they would never land on Eilanmore, or, if need be, only in broad daylight, and never alone.

The days went well for James Achanna, where he made his home at Ranza-beag, on Ranza Water in the Sleat of Skye. The farm was small but good, and he hoped that with help and care he would soon have the place as good a farm as there was in all Skye.

Donald Macarthur did not let him see much of Katreen, but the old man was no longer opposed to him. Sheumais must wait till Ian Macarthur came back again, which might be any day now. For sure, James Achanna of Ranza-beag was a very different person from the youngest of the Achanna-folk who held by on lonely Eilanmore; moreover, the old man could not but think with pleasure that it would be well to see Katreen able to walk over the whole land of Ranza, from the cairn at the north of his own Ranza-Mòr to the burn at the south of Ranza-beag, and know it for her own.

But Achanna was ready to wait. Even before he had the secret word of Katreen he knew from her beautiful dark eyes that she loved him. As the weeks went by they managed to meet often, and at last Katreen told him that she loved him too, and would have none but him; but that they must wait till Ian came back, because of the pledge given to him by her father. They were days of joy for him. Through many a hot noon-tide hour, through many a gloaming, he went as one in a dream. Whenever he saw a birch swaying in the wind, or a wave leaping upon Loch Liath, that was near his home, or passed a bush covered with wild roses, or saw the moonbeams lying white on the boles of the pines, he thought of Katreen: his fawn for grace, and so lithe and tall, with sun-brown face and wavy dark mass of hair and shadowy eyes and rowan-red lips. It is said that there is a god clothed in shadow who goes to and fro among the human kind, putting silence between lovers with his waving hands, and breathing a chill out of his cold breath, and leaving a gulf of deep water flowing between them because of the passing of

his feet. That shadow never came their way. Their love grew as a flower fed by rains and warmed by sunlight.

When midsummer came, and there was no sign of Ian Macarthur, it was already too late. Katreen had been won.

During the summer months, it was the custom for Katreen and two of the farm girls to go up Maol-Ranza, to reside at the shealing of Cnoc-an-Fhraoch: and this because of the hill-pasture for the sheep. Cnoc-an-Fhraoch is a round, boulder-studded hill covered with heather, which has a precipitous corrie on each side, and in front slopes down to Lochan Fraoch, a lochlet surrounded by dark woods. Behind the hill, or great hillock rather, lay the shealing. At each week-end Katreen went down to Ranza-Mòr, and on every Monday morning at sunrise returned to her heather-girt eyrie. It was on one of these visits that she endured a cruel shock. Her father told her that she must marry some one else than Sheumais Achanna. He had heard words about him which made a union impossible, and, indeed, he hoped that the man would leave Ranza-beag. In the

end, he admitted that what he had heard was to the effect that Achanna was under a doom of some kind; that he was involved in a blood feud; and, moreover, that he was fëy. The old man would not be explicit as to the person from whom his information came, but hinted that he was a stranger of rank, probably a laird of the isles. Besides this, there was word of Ian Macarthur. He was at Thurso, in the far north, and would be in Skye before long, and he—her father—had written to him that he might wed Katreen as soon as was practicable.

"Do you see that lintie yonder, father?" was her response to this.

"Ay, lass; and what about the birdeen?"

"Well, when she mates with a hawk, so will I be mating with Ian Macarthur, but not till then."

With that she turned, and left the house, and went back to Cnoc-an-Fhraoch. On the way she met Achanna.

It was that night that, for the first time, he swam across Lochan Fraoch to meet Katreen.

The quickest way to reach the shealing was

to row across the lochlet, and then ascend by a sheep-path that wound through the hazel copses at the base of the hill. Fully half-an-hour was thus saved, because of the steepness of the precipitous corries to right and left. A boat was kept for this purpose, but it was fastened to a shore-boulder by a padlocked iron chain, the key of which was kept by Donald Macarthur. Latterly he had refused to let this key out of his possession. For one thing, no doubt, he believed he could thus restrain Achanna from visiting his daughter. The young man could not approach the shealing from either side without being seen.

But that night, soon after the moon was whitening slow in the dark, Katreen stole down to the hazel copse and awaited the coming of her lover. The lochan was visible from almost any point on Cnoc-an-Fhraoch, as well as from the south side. To cross it in a boat unseen, if any watcher were near, would be impossible, nor could even a swimmer hope to escape notice unless in the gloom of night, or, mayhap, in the dusk. When, however, she saw, half way across the water, a spray of green branches slowly moving athwart

the surface, she knew that Sheumais was keeping his tryst. If, perchance, any one else saw, he or she would never guess that those derelict rowan-branches shrouded Sheumais Achanna.

It was not till the estray had drifted close to the ledge, where, hid among the bracken and the hazel undergrowth, she awaited him, that Katreen descried the face of her lover, as with one hand he parted the green sprays and stared longingly and lovingly at the figure he could just discern in the dim fragrant obscurity.

And as it was this night, so was it on many of the nights that followed. Katreen spent the days as in a dream. Not even the news of her cousin Ian's return disturbed her much.

One day the inevitable meeting came. She was at Ranza-Mòr, and when a shadow came into the dairy where she was standing she looked up, and saw Ian before her. She thought he appeared taller and stronger than ever, though still not so tall as Sheumais, who would appear slim beside the Herculean Skye man. But as she looked at his close curling black hair, and thick bull neck, and the sullen

eyes in his dark wind-red face, she wondered that she had ever tolerated him at all.

He broke the ice at once.

"Tell me, Katreen, are you glad to see me back again?"

"I am glad that you are home once more safe and sound."

"And will you make it my home for me by coming to live with me, as I've asked you again and again."

"No, as I've told you again and again."

He gloomed at her angrily for a few moments before he resumed.

"I will be asking you this one thing, Katreen, daughter of my father's brother: do you love that man Achanna who lives at Ranza-beag?"

"You may ask the wind why it is from the east or the west, but it won't tell you. You're not the wind's master."

"If you think I will let this man take you away from me, you are thinking a foolish thing."

"And you saying a foolisher."

"Ay?"

"Ay, sure. What could you do, Ian-mhic-

Ian? At the worst, you could do no more than kill James Achanna. What then? I too would die. You cannot separate us. I would not marry you, now, though you were the last man on the world and I the last woman."

"You're a fool, Katreen Macarthur. Your father has promised you to me, and I tell you this: if you love Achanna you'll save his life only by letting him go away from here. I promise you he will not be here long."

"Ay, you promise *me*; but you will not say that thing to James Achanna's face. You are a coward."

With a muttered oath the man turned on his heel.

"Let him beware o' me, and you, too, Katreen-mo-nighean-donn. I swear it by my mother's grave and by St Martin's Cross that you will be mine by hook or by crook."

The girl smiled scornfully. Slowly she lifted a milk-pail.

"It would be a pity to waste the good milk, Ian-gòrach; but if you don't go it is I that will be emptying the pail on you, and then you'll be as white without as your heart is within."

"So, you call me witless, do you? *Ian-gorach!* Well, we shall be seeing as to that; and as for the milk, there will be more than milk spilt because of *you*, Katreen-donn."

From that day, though neither Sheumais nor Katreen knew of it, a watch was set upon Achanna.

It could not be long before their secret was discovered; and it was with a savage joy overmastering his sullen rage that Ian Macarthur knew himself the discoverer, and conceived his double vengeance. He dreamed, gloatingly, on both the black thoughts that roamed like ravenous beasts through the solitudes of his heart. But he did not dream that another man was filled with hate because of Katreen's lover—another man who had sworn to make her his own; the man who, disguised, was known in Armadale as Donald McLean, and in the north isles would have been hailed as Gloom Achanna.

There had been steady rain for three days, with a cold raw wind. On the fourth the sun shone, and set in peace. An evening of quiet beauty followed, warm, fragrant, dusky from the absence of moon or star, though the

thin veils of mist promised to disperse as the night grew.

There were two men that eve in the undergrowth on the south side of the lochlet. Sheumais had come earlier than his wont. Impatient for the dusk, he could scarce await the waning of the afterglow. Surely, he thought, he might venture. Suddenly his ears caught the sound of cautious footsteps. Could it be old Donald, perhaps, with some inkling of the way in which his daughter saw her lover, in despite of all; or, mayhap, might it be Ian Macarthur tracking him, as a hunter stalking a stag by the water-pools? He crouched, and waited. In a few minutes he saw Ian carefully picking his way. The man stooped as he descried the green branches; smiled as, with a low rustling, he raised them from the ground.

Meanwhile, yet another man watched and waited, though on the farther side of the lochan, where the hazel copses were. Gloom Achanna half hoped, half feared the approach of Katreen. It would be sweet to see her again, sweet to slay her lover before her eyes, brother to him though he was. But, there was the chance that she might descry

him, and, whether recognisingly or not, warn the swimmer. So it was that he had come there before sundown, and now lay crouched among the bracken underneath a projecting mossy ledge close upon the water, where it could scarce be that she or any should see him.

As the gloaming deepened, a great stillness reigned. There was no breath of wind. A scarce audible sigh prevailed among the spires of the heather. The churring of a night-jar throbbed through the darkness. Somewhere a corncrake called its monotonous *crék-craik*—the dull harsh sound emphasising the utter stillness. The pinging of the gnats hovering over and among the sedges made an incessant rumour through the warm sultry air.

There was a splash once as of a fish; then silence. Then a lower but more continuous splash, or rather wash of water. A slow susurrus rustled through the dark.

Where he lay among the fern Gloom Achanna slowly raised his head, stared through the shadows, and listened intently. If Katreen were waiting there she was not near.

Noiselessly he slid into the water. When he rose it was under a clump of green branches. These he had cut and secured three hours before. With his left hand he swam slowly, or kept his equipoise in the water; with his right he guided the heavy rowan bough. In his mouth were two objects, one long and thin and dark, the other with an occasional glitter as of a dead fish.

His motion was scarce perceptible. None the less he was nigh the middle of the loch almost as soon the other clump of green branches. Doubtless the swimmer beneath it was confident that he was now safe from observation.

The two clumps of green branches drew nearer. The smaller seemed a mere stray—a spray blown down by the recent gale. But all at once the larger clump jerked awkwardly and stopped. Simultaneously a strange low strain of music came from the other.

The strain ceased. The two clumps of green branches remained motionless. Slowly at last the larger moved forward. It was too dark for the swimmer to see if any one lay hid behind the smaller. When he reached it he thrust aside the leaves.

It was as though a great salmon leaped. There was a splash, and a narrow dark body shot through the gloom. At the end of it something gleamed. Then suddenly there was a savage struggle. The inanimate green branches tore this way and that, and surged and swirled. Gasping cries came from the leaves. Again and again the gleaming thing leaped. At the third leap an awful scream shrilled through the silence. The echo of it wailed thrice with horrible distinctness in the corrie beyond Cnoc-an-Fhraoch. Then, after a faint splashing, there was silence once more. One clump of green branches drifted loosely up the lochlet. The other moved steadily towards the place whence, a brief while before, it had stirred.

Only one thing lived in the heart of Gloom Achanna—the joy of his exultation. He had killed his brother Sheumais. He had always hated him because of his beauty; of late he had hated him because he had stood between him, Gloom, and Katreen Macarthur, because he had become her lover. They were all dead now except himself—all the Achannas. He was “Achanna.” When the day came

that he would go back to Galloway there would be a magpie on the first birk, and a screaming jay on the first rowan, and a croaking raven on the first fir. Ay, he would be their suffering, though they knew nothing of him meanwhile! He would be Achanna of Achanna again. Let those who would stand in his way beware. As for Katreen: perhaps he would take her there, perhaps not. He smiled.

These thoughts were the wandering fires in his brain while he slowly swam shoreward under the floating green branches, and as he disengaged himself from them, and crawled upward through the bracken. It was at this moment that a third man entered the water from the farther shore.

Prepared as he was to come suddenly upon Katreen, Gloom was startled when, in a place of dense shadow, a hand touched his shoulder, and her voice whispered, "*Sheumais, Sheumais!*"

The next moment she was in his arms. He could feel her heart beating against his side.

"What was it, Sheumais? What was that awful cry?" she whispered.

For answer he put his lips to hers, and kissed her again and again.

The girl drew back. Some vague instinct warned her.

"What is it, Sheumais? Why don't you speak?"

He drew her close again.

"Pulse of my heart, it is I who love you—I who love you best of all. It is I, Gloom Achanna!"

With a cry, she struck him full in the face. He staggered, and in that moment she freed herself.

"You *coward!*"

"Katreen, I . . . "

"Come no nearer. If you do, it will be the death of you!"

"The death o' me! Ah, bonnie fool that you are, and is it you that will be the death o' me?"

"Ay, Gloom Achanna, for I have but to scream and Sheumais will be here, an' he would kill you like a dog if he knew you did me harm."

"Ah, but if there were no James, or any man, to come between me an' my will!"

"Then there would be a woman! Ay, if you overbore me I would strangle you with my hair, or fix my teeth in your false throat!"

"I was not for knowing you were such a wild-cat! But I'll tame you yet, my lass! Aha, wild-cat!" and, as he spoke, he laughed low.

"It is a true word, Gloom of the black heart. I *am* a wild-cat, and like a wild-cat I am not to be seized by a fox, and that you will be finding to your cost, by the holy St Bridget! But now, off with you, brother of my man!"

"Your man . . . ha! ha! . . ."

"Why do you laugh?"

"Sure, I am laughing at a warm white lass like yourself having a dead man as your lover!"

"A . . . dead . . . man?"

No answer came. The girl shook with a new fear. Slowly she drew closer till her breath fell warm against the face of the other. He spoke at last.

"Ay, a dead man."

"It is a lie."

"Where would you be that you were not

hearing his goodbye? I'm thinking it was loud enough!"

"It is a lie . . . it is a lie!"

"No, it is no lie. Sheumais is cold enough now. He's low among the weeds by now. Ay, by now; down there in the lochan."

"*What . . . you, you devil!* Is it for killing your own brother you would be!"

"I killed no one. He died his own way. Maybe the cramp took him. Maybe . . . maybe a kelpie gripped him. I watched. I saw him beneath the green branches. He was dead before he died. I saw it in the white face o' him. Then he sank. He's dead—James is dead. Look here, girl, I've always loved you. I swore the oath upon you—you're mine. Sure, you're mine now, Katreen! It is loving you I am! It will be a south wind for you from this day, *muir-nean mochree!* See here, I'll show you how I . . . "

"Back . . . back . . . *murderer!*"

"Be stopping that foolishness now, Katreen Macarthur! By the Book, I am tired of it! I am loving you, and it's having you for mine I am! And if you won't come to me

like the dove to its mate, I'll come to you like the hawk to the dove!"

With a spring he was upon her. In vain she strove to beat him back. His arms held her as a stoat grips a rabbit.

He pulled her head back, and kissed her throat till the strangulating breath sobbed against his ear. With a last despairing effort she screamed the name of the dead man—"Sheumais! Sheumais! Sheumais!" The man who struggled with her laughed.

"Ay, call away! The herrin' will be coming through the bracken as soon as Sheumais comes to your call! Ah, it is mine you are now, Katreen! He's dead an' cold, . . . an' you'd best have a living man . . . an' . . ."

She fell back, her balance lost in the sudden releasing. What did it mean? Gloom still stood there, but as one frozen. Through the darkness she saw at last that a hand gripped his shoulder—behind him a black mass vaguely obtruded.

For some moments there was absolute silence. Then a hoarse voice came out of the dark.

"You will be knowing now who it is, Gloom Achanna!"

The voice was that of Sheumais, who lay dead in the lochan. The murderer shook as in a palsy. With a great effort, slowly he turned his head. He saw a white splash—the face of the corpse. In this white splash flamed two burning eyes, the eyes of the soul of the brother whom he had slain.

He reeled, staggered as a blind man, and, free now of that awful clasp, swayed to and fro as one drunken.

Slowly Sheumais raised an arm, and pointed downward through the wood towards the lochan. Still pointing, he moved swiftly forward. With a cry like a beast, Gloom Achanna swung to one side, stumbled, rose, and leaped into the darkness.

For some minutes Sheumais and Katreen stood, silent, apart, listening to the crashing sound of his flight—the race of the murderer against the pursuing shadow of the Grave.

THE ARCHER

THE ARCHER

THE man who told me this thing was Coll McColl, an islander of Barra, in the Southern Hebrides. He spoke in the Gaelic, and it was while he was mending his net; and by the same token I thought at the time that his words were like herring-fry in that net, some going clean through, and others sticking fast by the gills. So I do not give it exactly as I heard it, but in substance as Coll gave it.

He is dead now, and has perhaps seen the Archer. Coll was a poet, and the island-folk said he was mad: but this was only because he loved beyond the reach of his fate.

There were two men who loved one woman. It is of no mere girl with the fair looks upon her I am speaking, but of a woman, that can put the spell over two men. The name of the woman was Silis: the names of the men were Sheumas and Isla.

Silis was the wife of Sheumas. So Sheumas had his home, for her breast was his pillow when he willed it: and he had her voice for daily music: and his eyes had never any thirst, for they could drink of her beauty by day and by night. But Isla had no home. He saw his home afar off, and his joy and his strength failed, because the shining lights of it were not for him.

One night the two men were upon the water. It was a dead calm, and the nets had been laid. There was no moon at all, and only a star or two up in the black corner of the sky. The sea had the wandering flames in it: and when the big jellyfish floated by, they were like the tide-lamps that some are for saying the dead bear on their drowned faces.

"Some day I may be telling you a strange thing, Sheumas," said Isla, after the long silence there had been since the last net had sent a little cloud of sparkles up from the gulfs.

"Ay?" said Sheumas, taking his pipe from his mouth, and looking at the spire of smoke rising just forward o' the mast. The water slipped by, soft and slow. It was only the tide feeling its way up the sea-loch, for there

was not a breath of wind. Here and there were dusky shadows: the boats of the fishermen of Inchghunnais. Each carried a red light, and in some were green lanterns slung midway up the mast.

No other word was said for a long time.

"And I'm wondering," said Isla at last: "I'm wondering what you'll think of that story."

Sheumas made no answer to that. He smoked, and stared down into the dark water.

After a time he rose, and leaned against the mast. Though there was no light of either moon or lamp, he put his hand above his eyes, as his wont was.

"I'm thinking the mackerel will be coming this way to-night. This is the third time I've heard the snoring of the pollack . . . away yonder, beyond Peter Macallum's boat."

"Well, Sheumas, I'll sleep a bit. I had only the outside of a sleep last night."

With that Isla knocked the ash out of his pipe, and lay over against a pile of rope, and shut his eyes, and did not sleep at all because of the sick dull pain of the homeless man he was—home, home, home, and Silis the name of it.

When, an hour or more later, he grew stiff he moved, and opened his eyes. His mate was sitting at the helm, but the light in his pipe was out, though he held the pipe in his mouth, and his eyes were wide staring open.

"I would not be telling me that story, Isla," he said.

Isla answered nothing, but shifted back to where he was before, for all his cramped leg. He closed his eyes again.

At the full of the tide, in the deep dark hour before the false dawn, as the first glimmer is called, the glimmer that comes and goes, both men got up, and moved about, stamping their feet. Each lit his pipe, and the smoke hung long in little greyish puffs, so dead-still was it.

On the *Brudhearg*, John Macalpine's boat, young Neil Macalpine sang. The two men on the *Luath* could hear his singing. It was one of the strange songs of Ian Mòr.

O, she will have the deep dark heart, for all her face is fair,
As deep and dark as though beneath the shadow of her hair:
For in her hair a spirit dwells that no white spirit is,
And hell is in the hopeless heaven of that lost spirit's kiss.

She has two men within the palm, the hollow of her hand :
She takes their souls and blows them forth as idle drifted sand :
And one falls back upon her breast that is his quiet home,
And one goes out into the night and is as wind-blown foam.

And when she sees the sleep of one, oft-times she rises there
And looks into the outer dark and calleth soft and fair :
And then the lost soul that afar within the dark doth roam
Comes laughing, laughing, laughing, and crying *Home ! Home !*

And is there any home for him, whose portion is the night ?
And is there any peace for him whose doom is endless flight ?
O wild sad bird, O wind-spent bird, O bird upon the wave,
There is no home for thee, wild bird, but in the cold sea-grave !

Sheumas leaned against the tiller of the *Luath*, and looked at Isla. He saw a shadow on his face. With his right foot the man tapped against a loose spar that was on the starboard deck.

When the singer ceased, Isla raised his arm and shook menacingly his clenched fist, over across the water to where the *Brudhearg* lay.

There were words on his lips, but they died away when Neil Macalpine broke into a love song, "Mo nighean donn."

"Can you be telling me, Isla," said Sheumas, "who was the man that made that song about the homeless man?"

"Ian Mòr."

"Ian Mòr of the Hills?"

"Ay."

"They say he had the shadow upon him?"

"Well, what then?"

"Was it because of love?"

"It was because of love."

"Did the woman love him?"

"Ay."

"Did she go to him?"

"No."

"Was that why he had the mind-dark?"

"Ay."

"But he loved her, and she loved him?"

"He loved her, and she loved him."

For a time Sheumas kept silence. Then he spoke again.

"She was the wife of another man?"

"Ay; she was the wife of another man."

"Did *he* love her?"

"Yes, for sure."

"Did *she* love *him*?"

"Yes . . . yes."

"Whom, then, did she love? For a woman can love one man only."

"She loved both."

"That is not a possible thing: not the one deep love. It is a lie, Isla Macleod."

"Yes, it is a lie, Sheumas Maclean."

"Which man did she love?"

Isla slowly shook the ash from his pipe, and looked for a second or two at a momentary quiver in the sky in the north-east.

"The dawn will be here soon now, Sheumas."

"Ay. I was asking you, Isla, which man did she love?"

"Sure she loved the man who gave her the ring."

"Which man did she love?"

"O for sure, man, you're asking me just like the lawyer who has the trials away at Balliemore on the mainland yonder."

"Well, I'll tell you that thing myself, Isla Macleod, if you'll tell me the name of the woman."

"I am not for knowing the name."

"Was it Mary . . . or Jessie . . . or mayhap was it Silis, now?"

"I am not for knowing the name."

"Well, well, it might be Silis, then?"

"Ay, for sure it might be Silis. As well Silis as any other."

"And what would the name of the other man be?"

"What man?"

"The man whose ring she wore?"

"I am not remembering that name."

"Well, now, would it be Padruic, or mayhap Ivor, or . . . or . . . perhaps, now, Sheumas?"

"Ay, it might be that."

"Sheumas?"

"Ay, as well that as any other."

"And what was the end?"

"The end o' what?"

"The end of that loving?"

Isla Macleod gave a low laugh. Then he stooped to pick up the pipe he had dropped. Suddenly he rose without touching it. He put his heel on the warm clay, and crushed it.

"That is the end of that kind of loving," he said. He laughed low again as he said that.

Sheumas leaned and picked up the trodden fragments.

"They're warm still, Macleod."

"Are they?" Isla cried at that, his eyes

with a red light coming into the blue: "then they will go where the man in the song went, the man who sought his home for ever and ever and never came any nearer than into the shine of the window-lamps."

With that he threw the pieces into the dark water that was already growing ashy-grey.

"'Tis a sure cure, that, Sheumas Maclean."

"Ay, so they say, . . . and so, so: ay, as you were saying, Ian Mòr went into the shadow because of that home he could not win?"

"So they say. And now we'll take the nets. 'Tis a heavy net that comes out black, as the sayin' is. They're heavy for sure, after this still night, an' the wind southerly, an' the pollack this way an' that."

"Well, now, that's strange."

"What is strange, Sheumas Maclean?"

"That you should say that thing."

"And for why that?"

"Oh, just this. Silis had a dream the other night, she had. She dreamed she saw you standing alone on the *Luath*: and you were hauling hard a heavy net, so that the sweat ran down your face. And your face was

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dead-white pale, she said. An' you hauled an' you hauled. An' someone beside you that she couldn't see laughed an' laughed: an' . . ."

With a stifled oath, Isla broke in upon the speaker's words:

"Why, man alive, you said he, the man, myself it is, was alone on the *Luath*."

"Well, Silis saw no one but yourself, Isla Macleod."

"But she heard some one beside me laughing an' laughing."

"So she said. And you were dead-white, she said: with the sweat pouring down you. An' you pulled an' you pulled. Then you looked up at her and said: '*It's a heavy net that comes up black, as the sayin' is.*'"

Isla Macleod made no answer to that, but slowly began to haul at the nets. A swift moving light slid hither and thither well away to the north-east. The sea greyed. A new, poignant, salt smell came up from the waves. Sail after sail of the smacks ceased to be a blur in the dark: each lifted a brown shadowy wing against a dusk through which a flood of myriad drops of light steadily oozed.

Now from this boat, now from that, hoarse cries resounded.

The *Mairi Ban* swung slowly round before the faint dawn-wind, and lifted her bow homeward with a little slapping splash. The *Maggie*, the *Trilleachan*, the *Eilid*, the *Jessie*, and the *Mairi Donn* followed one by one.

In silence the two men on the *Luath* hauled in their nets. The herring made a sheet of shifting silver as they lay in the hold. As the dawn lightened, the quivering silver mass sparkled. The decks were mailed with glittering scales: these, too, gleamed upon the legs, arms, and hands of the two fishermen.

"Well, that's done!" exclaimed Sheumas at last. "Up with the helm, Isla, and let us make for home."

The *Luath* forged ahead rapidly when once the sail had its bellyful of wind. She passed the *Tern*, then the *Jessie Macalpine*, caught up the big, lumbering *Maggie*, and went rippling and rushing along the wake of the *Eilid*, the lightest of the Inchghunnais boats.

Off shore, the steamer *Osprey* met the smacks, and took the herring away, cran by

cran. Long before her screw made a yeast of foam athwart the black-green inshore water, the *Luath* was in the little haven and had her nose in the shingle at Craigard point.

In silence Sheumas and Isla walked by the rock-path to the isolated cottage where the Macleans lived. The swallows were flitting hither and thither in front of its low, white-washed wall, like flying shuttles against a silent loom. The pale gold of a rainy dawn lit the whiteness with a vivid gleam. Suddenly Isla stopped.

"Will you be telling me now, Sheumas, which man it was that she loved?"

Maclean did not look at the speaker, though he stopped too. He stared at the white cottage, and at the little square window with the geranium-pot on the lintel.

But while he hesitated, Isla Macleod turned away, and walked swiftly across the wet bracken and bog-myrtle till he disappeared over Cnoc-na-Hurich, on the hidden slope of which his own cottage stood amid a wilderness of whins.

Sheumas watched him till he was out of sight. It was then only that he answered the question.

"I'm thinking," he muttered slowly, "I'm thinking she loved Ian Mòr."

"Yes," he muttered again later, as he took off his sea-soaked clothes, and lay down on the bed in the kitchen, whence he could see into the little room where Silis was in a profound sleep: "Yes, I'm thinking she loved Ian Mòr."

He did not sleep at all, for all his weariness.

When the sunlight streamed in across the red sandstone floor, and crept towards his wife's bed, he rose softly and looked at her. He did not need to stoop when he entered the room, as Isla Macleod would have had to do.

He looked at Silis a long time. Her shadowy hair was all about her face. She had never seemed to him more beautiful. Well was she called "Silis the Fawn" in the poem that some one had made about her.

The poem that some one had made about her? . . . yes, for sure, how could he be forgetting who it was. Was it not Isla, and he a poet too, another Ian Mòr they said.

"Another Ian Mòr." As he repeated the words below his breath, he bent over his wife.

R

Her white breast rose and fell, the way a moonbeam does in moving water.

Then he knelt. When he took the slim white hand in his she did not wake. It closed lovingly upon his own.

A smile slowly came and went upon the dreaming face—ah, lovely, white, dreaming face, with the hidden starry eyes. There was a soft flush, and a parting of the lips. The half-covered bosom rose and fell as with some groundswell from the beating heart.

"*Silis*," he whispered. "*Silis . . . Silis . . .*"

She smiled. He leaned close above her lips.

"Ah, heart o' me," she whispered, "O Isla, Isla, mo rùn, moghray, Isla, Isla, Isla!"

Sheumas drew back. He too was like the man in her dream, for it was dead-white he was, with the sweat in great beads upon his face.

He made no noise as he went back to the hearthside, and took his wet clothes from where he had hung them before the smoored peats, and put them on again.

Then he went out.

It was a long walk to Isla Macleod's cottage that few-score yards: a long, long walk.

When Sheumas stood on the wet grass round the flagstones he saw that the door was ajar. Isla had not lain down. He had taken his ash-lute, and was alternately playing and singing low to himself.

Maclean went close up to the wall, and listened. At first he could hear no more than snatches of songs.

And is there any home for him whose portion is the night? . . .

And one goes out into the night and is as wind-blown foam. . . .

O heart that is breaking,
Breaking, breaking,
O for the home that I canna, canna win :
O the weary aching,
The weary, weary aching
To be in the home that I canna, canna win !

Then suddenly the man within put down his ash-lute, and stirred. In a loud vibrant voice he sang :

O far away upon the hills at the lighting of the dawn
I saw a stirring in the fern and out there leapt a fawn :
And O my heart was up at that and like a wind it blew
Till its shadow hovered o'er the fawn as 'mid the fern it
flew.

And *Silis ! Silis ! Silis !* was the wind-song on the hill,
And *Silis ! Silis ! Silis !* did the echoing corries fill :
My hunting heart was glad indeed, at the lighting of the
dawn,
For O it was the hunting then of my bonnie, bonnie
Fawn !

For some moments there was dead silence.
Then a heavy sigh came from within the
cottage.

Sheumas Maclean at last made a step forward. But before his shadow fell across the doorway Isla had breathed a few melancholy notes from his *feadan*, and then began a slow wailing song.

O heart that is breaking,
Breaking, breaking,
O for the home that I canna, canna win :
O the weary aching,
The weary, weary aching
To be in the home that I canna, canna win !

For O the long home-sickness,
The long, long home-sickness !
'Tis slow, slow death for me who long for home, for home !
And a heart is breaking,
I know a heart that's breaking,
All to be at home at last, to be at home, at home,
O Silis, Silis,
Home, Home, Home !

Sheumas' face was white and tired. It is weary work with the herring, no doubt.

He lifted a white stone and rapped loudly on the door. Isla came out, and looked at him. The singer smiled, though that smiling had no light in it. It was dark as a dark wave it was.

"Well?" he said.

"May I come in?"

"Come in, and welcome. And what will you be wanting, Sheumas Maclean?"

"Sure, it's too late to sleep, an' I'm thinking I would like to hear now that story you were to tell me."

The man gave no answer to that. Each looked at the other with luminous unwinking eyes.

"It will not be a fair thing," said Isla slowly, at last. "It will not be a fair thing: for I am bigger and stronger."

"There is another way, Isla Macleod."

"Ay?"

"That you or I go to her, and tell her all, and then at the last say: 'Come with me, or stay with him.'"

"So be it."

So there and then they drew for chance. The gaining of that hazard was with Sheumas Maclean.

Without a word Isla turned and went into the house. There he took his feadan, and played low to himself, staring into the red heart of the smouldering peats. He neither smiled nor frowned ; but only once he smiled, and that was when Sheumas came back, and said *Come*.

So the two walked in silence across the dewy grass. There was a loud calling of skuas and terns, and the raucous laughing cry of the great herring-gull, upon the weedy shore of Craigard. The tide bubbled and oozed through the wilderness of wrack. Farther off there were the cackling of hens, the lowing of restless kye, and the bleating of the sheep on the slopes of Melmonach. A shrewd salt air tingled in the nostrils of the two men.

At the closed door Sheumas made a sign of silence. Then he unfastened the latch, and entered.

"Silis," he said in a low voice, but clear.

"Silis, I've come back again. Dry your tears, my lass, and tell me once again—for

I'm dying to hear the blessed truth once again—tell me once again if it's me you love best, or Isla Macleod."

"I have told you, Sheumas."

Without, Isla heard her words and drew closer.

"And it is a true thing that you love me best, and that since the choice between him and me has come, you choose me?"

"It is a true thing."

A shadow fell across the room. Isla Macleod stood in the doorway.

Silis turned the white beautiful face of her, and looked at the man she loved with all her heart and all her soul. He smiled. She was no coward, his Silis, though he called her his fawn.

"Is—it—a—true—thing, Silis?" he asked slowly.

She looked at Sheumas, then at Isla, then back at her husband.

"It might kill Sheumas," she muttered below her breath, so that neither heard her: "it might kill him," she repeated.

Then, with a swift turn of her eyes, she spoke.

"Yes, it is a true thing, Isla. I abide by Sheumas."

That was all.

She was conscious of the wave of relief that went into Sheumas' face. She saw the rising of a dark, strange tide in the eyes of Isla.

He stared at her. Perhaps he did not hear? Perhaps he was dreaming still? He was a dreamer, a poet: perhaps he could not understand.

It was a little while wherein to kill a man.

"My Fawn," he whispered hoarsely, "my wee Fawn!"

But Silis was frozen.

The deadly frost in her eyes slew the dream that the brain of the poet dreamed.

Then it slew the poet.

Isla, the man, stood awhile, strangely tremulous. She could see his nerves quivering below his clothes. He was a big, strong giant of a lover: but he trembled now just like a bit fawn, she thought. His blue eyes were suddenly grown cloudy and dim. Then the deadly frost slew the brain that was the

altar where the poet offered up his dreams of beauty.

And that is how Isla the dreamer ceased to dream.

He was quite white and still when they found him three days later. He seemed a giant of a man as he lay, face upward, among the green flags by the water-edge. The chill starlight of three nights had got into the quiet of his face.

That night, resumed Coll McColl, after a long pause—that night he, Coll, was walking in the moonlight across the hither slope of Melmonach.

He stood under a rowan-tree, and watched a fawn leaping wildly through the fern. While he watched, amazed, he saw a tall shadowy woman pass by. She stopped, and drew a great bow she carried, and shot an arrow. It went through the air with a sharp whistling sound—just like *Silis—Silis—Silis*, Coll said, to give me an idea of it.

The arrow went right through the fawn.

But here was a strange thing. The fawn leapt away sobbing into the night: while its

heart suspended, arrow-pierced, from the white stem of a silver birch.

"And to this day," said Coll at the last, "I am not for knowing who that archer was, or who that fawn. You think it was these two who loved? Well, 'tis Himself knows. But I have this thought of my thinking: that it was only a vision I saw, and that the fawn was the poor suffering heart of Love, and that the Archer was the great Shadowy Archer that hunts among the stars. For in the dark of the morrow after that night I was on Cnoc-na-Hurich, and I saw a woman there shooting arrow after arrow against the stars. At dawn she rose and passed away, like smoke, beyond those pale wandering fires.



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